

ACME

Winter No. 3

STARTLING MYSTERY STORIES

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UNUSUAL - EERIE - STRANGE

Jules de Grandin

in

**THE BLOOD-
FLOWER**

by

SEABURY QUINN

**THE INN
OF TERROR**

by

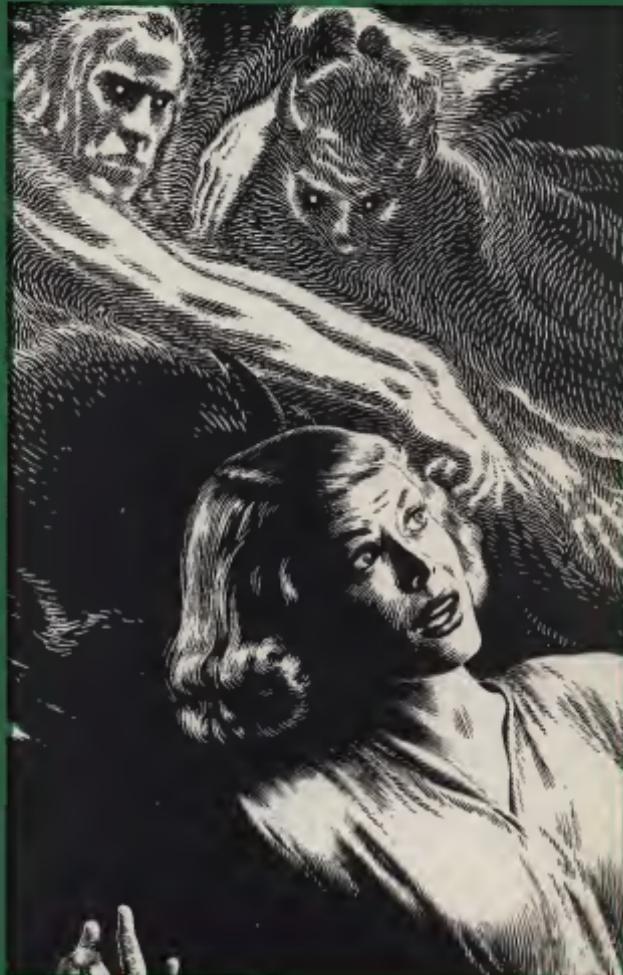
GASTON LEROUX

**THE DOOR
OF DOOM**

by

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STARTLING MYSTERY STORIES

Volume 1

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Robert A. W. Lowndes, *Editor*

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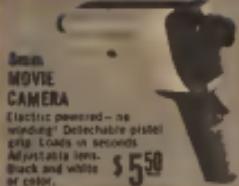
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The Editor's Page

TOO LATE for inclusion in *The Cauldron*, Reader P. J. Andrews, who asks that his address be withheld, writes in to say: "I enjoyed *The Scourge of B'moth* in the second issue of STARTLING MYSTERY STORIES, but there is one thing about these old stories that bothers me. There's a date indicated in this one, some time in the 1920's. That's all right — *but* the story is about pretty world-shaking events which we all know never happened in the 20's. Maybe when it was first published, you could think about it as happening in the future, if you took out the date, and it could come off as a sort of weird science fiction tale. But now that it is positively tied in with a past that never was . . . I don't know. I *liked* the story. But it sort of annoys me.

"I know the Sherlock Holmes never happened back in the '90's, either. But somehow I can picture these things as going on, and being alive at that time but not knowing about it because I didn't see anything about it in the papers. Holmes doesn't get newspaper publicity, and what writeups there are, that are supposed to appear in the *Times* of London or whatever, only relate Scotland Yard's part in solving the crime. That protects the feeling of verisimilitude, if you get what I mean. . . . Don't you think, though, it might be better in running these old stories to leave out any indication of the times when they are supposed to be happening?"

Well, it's a problem.

Look at H. G. Wells' novel, *The War of the Worlds*, for example. I don't recall now whether the author gave any specification as to the date, though Garrett P. Serviss did write a sort of sequel, *Edison's Conquest of Mars*, which tells about a retaliatory raid — to avenge the Martian invasion of 1895. Whether Serviss deduced that date as the most probable, from the context of Wells' novel, or Wells mentioned it, it adds up to the same thing. We all know it did not happen in 1895. Does that wreck the story?

The context of the novel indicates that it had to have been written in the late 19th century; the London that is described is late 19th century London.

Bertram Russell's story suggests a more or less definite context of the 1920's when you've read it through, or perhaps it comes

(Turn to page 8)

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THE EDITOR'S PAGE (continued from page 6)

through pretty well before you're too far in it. But unless some sort of date is given, a story is generally assumed to be taking place in the "present" — and the Russell story has very little verisimilitude in relation to 1966. Not that such a fantastic series of events — I mean, the menace itself — is absolutely impossible in 1966, but that there are too many things that just could not have happened that way in 1966, while they *might* have happened that way in the '20's.

The same thing goes with the Jules de Grandin stories. What about *The Mansion of Unholy Magic* and *The House of Horror*? There are elements there which only make sense if the story is located back in the Prohibition Era. More than that, how can you account for these things happening and never getting any publicity? Well, considering the state of communications in the '20's, we can accept this as possible, at least; but in 1966, when the slightest unusual event gets spread over TV? (It's true, most of the "Flying Saucer" reports, etc., do not get on to TV — but just the same, they are widely spread around by the efforts of interested amateurs, both believers and non-believers.)

What about Fu Manchu? He's made a real comeback, and here is an international threat. The early novels have not been updated in any way at all, though as he went along, the author incorporated the changing times into the texture of the series. Fu Manchu sort of evolves as the stories go along; as I recall, there is less stress upon the international "yellow peril" and more upon the insidious doctor's personal and private ambitions and projects.

To get back to de Grandin, I remember that I didn't find any difficulty with Seabury Quinn's revised and updated versions of the dozen tales in this series which appear in *The Phantom Fighter*. The question that I brought up above didn't occur to me when I was reading them in the Arkham House edition, and I didn't think of it when I reviewed the book briefly in our last issue. I wonder if it would have occurred to me had this been my very first reading of de Grandin — or of these particular stories. This is something I cannot answer; perhaps some reader who was introduced to de Grandin by these stories, rather than either the original versions of them, or by the ones we have run here — can answer.

The way I see it, if a story holds you all the way through while
(Turn to page 126)

The Inn Of Terror

by *Gaston Leroux*

"SPEAKING OF women," said Chaulieu, "I would never wish any of you a honeymoon like the one I took with my first wife. . . . But here's the story without any further preamble. On my return from Saigon in 1908, I asked headquarters for a furlough and took advantage of it to marry little Maria-Luce of Mourillon, as had been previously decided. Her father had died in Madagascar and she lived with her grandfather.

"We went to Switzerland on our honeymoon. It was my idea, because at heart I'm a staid fellow, a landlubber, and I hate adventures. If I was a sea captain for twenty years, it was simply to follow the family tradition and to please my parents, but the very thought of it in the beginning made me seasick.

"Well, there we were in Switzerland, my young bride and I, as in the days of Topp-

It was known as "The Inn of Blood", and the new owners had restored all things as they were . . .

fer. We were very much in love, and . . . Have you ever been in Soleure?"

"I was married in Borneo," chuckled Dorat, the biggest wag in the party of old sea-dogs who spun their yarns on the terrace of the Cafe of the Old Wet-Dock, in Toulon.

"I see. . . . Well, Soleure might have been called the capital of French Switzerland — a long, quiet street with picture signboards swinging on their rods at the slightest puff of wind from the Wesseinstein.

"The Wesseinstein is one of the summits in the Jura mountains. It rises at the northwest of the town. More than one tourist has lost his way in the gorges and paths of the forest, and there are no hotels before reaching the summit, with the exception of one which, at the time, boasted a very sinister reputation.

"Two years before our trip, the town board had discovered, at the bottom of a well and in a near-by grotto, twelve skeletons and some objects belonging to travelers who had found a fatal hospitality there.

"The subsequent investigations brought to light the fact that the crimes had been committed by a couple who had so thoroughly terrorized the neighborhood that even the death of the two innkeepers, the dreadful Weisbachs — the story was in all the newspapers at the

time — did not loosen any tongues. You see, a few old-timers in the mountains had suspected some of the goings-on; but Jean Weisbach had made it very clear that he did not care to have people meddling in his business, and they had let bad enough alone.

"The innkeepers had died quietly in their beds, in the end, rich and esteemed, as also did their factotum, one Daniel. When the mare's nest was discovered, the examining magistrates were able, after questioning hither and yon and forcing some stubborn old neighbors to speak, to reconstruct the crimes. The most important witness was an old woman with a goiter, who related certain horrible details which showed that, besides greed for money, the Weisbachs had had a strain of sadism and cruelty in them that has rarely been exceeded.

"NATURALLY, this story was the chief topic of conversation in Soleure. The travelers, who were to go by coach to the peak of the Wesseinstein, to sleep in the hotel made famous by Napoleon, and from there go back into France through the Belfort gap, promised themselves by all means to stop for a drink, halfway up, at the 'Inn of Blood'. It had been called that as much because of the story as for the color it was painted. To stop there was one

of the things planned in the trip up the mountain. While the driver gave the horses to drink, the tourists went inside to the bar and gossiped with the new proprietors. These two had been there only a year. Their predecessors, the immediate successors of the Weisbachs, had left the premises, as soon as the scandal broke, on the grounds that they were ruined. But the Scheffers, being shrewdier, had said to themselves that there were plenty of fools in the world, whose curiosity would probably make them rich. Their reasoning had not been bad, if one could believe what was said in town. All the strangers now passing through Soleure wanted, of all things, to see the 'Inn of Blood', and some even went so far as to sleep there.

"The weather was fine the day that Maria-Luce and I left for the Wesseinstein by diligence. We had had an excellent lunch and were prepared to enjoy a lovely drive, and live a few ideally romantic hours like a chapter from a novel. We had left our luggage in Soleure and were to return there for it. Maria-Luce had only a small handbag with her.

"Ah! we were in love! . . . I had hired the coupe of the stage-coach just for the two of us, so that we could be by ourselves and kiss when we felt

like it, which was only natural after all!

"JUST AS WE were about to leave, a man and woman arrived on the scene . . . a handsome pair! I'll never forget them as long as I live, and with reason. They were Italians: he, a big, handsome man, too handsome, in the thirties, with big, dark eyes like velvet, the kind of eyes they have in Italy and that make the signorinas lose their heads . . . flashing teeth, olive skin, clean-shaven and the appearance of an actor. He was one, in fact, a tenor who was already well-known and had had a brilliant success at La Scala in Milan . . . Antonio Ferretti as we learned later. . . . Amiable, jovial, in perfect health, he felt that he owned the world.

"His companion, who adored him openly with every look, was obviously his, body and soul. She was a young, ravishingly beautiful woman, as golden-haired as a Venetian, which she was, and belonging to the highest aristocracy. . . . Countess Olivia Orsino. The handsome tenor had abducted her.

"I'm telling you all this at the start to get rid of it, so that you can understand the people at first sight, which was more than we did; all we considered at the moment was the fact that an annoying couple wanted to join us in the coupe, un-

der the pretense that the interior compartment of the coach was already practically full, and would even have driven us out if it had been possible. An argument ensued, of course; the handsome tenor's free and easy manner irritated me, and I was even more annoyed because I had been so pleased with the idea of just the two of us taking this little trip together. If he had been more polite, however, Antonio Ferretti would certainly have won his cause, because after all I'm not a roughneck, and as I said before, his companion was charming.

"Maria-Luce advised me to give in, but one word spoiled everything, something like 'damned savages, these French'. I slammed the door violently, and as I had already paid for the four seats I insisted on my right and they were obliged to sit with the others. As a matter of fact, if it annoyed them to travel by diligence they had only to rent a carriage, but it wasn't an easy thing in those days, when automobiles were not prevalent, to find horses and carriage to go up to the Wesseinstein. They had to be wagons specially built like the diligence, with a hanging rod always ready to grip the road in case of slipping back, which was always to be feared. If I have lingered over this incident it is because it assumed

a terrible importance, alas! for some of us.

"Our drive started through a pretty little cut in the hills, fresh, wooded, resounding with rippling waters, and in which nestled a little retreat, famous in that neighborhood — it was that of Saint Venere, Verena Einsiedolei, if I'm not mistaken — with chapels, grottoes, overhanging rocks, and from time to time, beautiful blocks of Soleure marble which caught the sun and shone in great, blinding spots.

"Three hours later we were in the depths of the forest, far from any dwelling, and the sun had disappeared. Big clouds floated between us and the mountain peaks, and before long a black veil hid the entire valley. At the same time a dull noise like thunder rumbled down toward us; but it was not the thunder yet: it was a heavy sledge, loaded with wood, which tumbled down the road on its runners with overwhelming rapidity. A young boy, perched up on top, steered it.

"It was under the threat of a coming storm that we finally caught sight of the Inn of Blood'. In the livid light of the twilight, it was not a pleasant sight with its squat, thick walls, barred windows and the old, arched door, studded with iron, which led to the famous well. The whole was covered with a horrible, brownish paint which,

it seems, is used on the arms of the guillotine.

"Heavens, but it's ugly!" Maria-Luce cried, and it really must have been, for that afternoon, I can assure you, we were both in a mood to find everything lovely. We had not been bored with each other on the ride up! We had told each other stories, we had made plans for the future, and we had kissed to the health of our two Italians.

"JUST AS THE diligence stopped in front of this sinister dwelling, a regular torrent of rain, accompanied by flashes of lightning and great growls of thunder, came down. We rushed into the inn, or rather into an enormous kitchen at the end of which was a tremendous fireplace large enough to burn a tree. At the present moment, however, only an honest little fire of dried branches was crackling away, and above it in an honest little pot, hung from a pot-hook, boiled a beef stew which smelled excellent. Before us stood the innkeeper, round-bellied like a barrel, with a pleasant manner, small, twinkling eyes peering out from creases of fat, and three chins, the tamest ogre in the world, all smiles.

"Are you reassured?" I asked Maria-Luce.

"Yes," she answered, "he won't have us cooked in that

little pot, and he seems delighted! . . . But what weather!"

"As a matter of fact, the driver had unharnessed the horses and gotten them under shelter because he was beginning to worry about the equilibrium of the carriage under the repeated claps of thunder. I asked him how long we would be staying here.

"'An hour,' he answered. 'I'll be off again in an hour, no matter what the weather does!'

"I figured that we would arrive at the hotel at the Wessenstein in the middle of the night, if we arrived at all, because the road skirted a precipice on the right. I came to a rapid decision, and Maria-Luce agreed with me; so, taking the innkeeper aside, I asked him if he had a room.

"'I have two,' the stout fellow answered, looking at me with a bantering twinkle in his eyes. 'You want to sleep here?'

"Yes. Show me your rooms!"

"If you'll just wait a moment until I have served the lady and gentleman in the drawing-room, I'll be at your service."

"What he called the drawing-room was a small room off the kitchen, furnished with a round table covered with oil-cloth, four chairs, and a few prints of the battles of the First Empire hanging on the walls, which were whitewashed. Our two Italians had made for this lux-

urious and comfortable nook on leaving the coach, in order to escape from associations from which they had already suffered.

"When Scheffer, the innkeeper, opened the door which they had closed, I saw the handsome tenor at the window looking out at the landscape sadly. His companion was seated with her elbows on the table and did not seem any more cheerful.

"The innkeeper came back to us.

"There are two more who want to sleep here! A drive in this rain doesn't attract them. You had better hurry about choosing your room, because, between you and me, there is only one decent one!"

"You can well imagine that I lost no time. We went up a stairway as steep as a ladder, that led on the left to the attic, which was directly over the kitchen, and on the right to a corridor which went to what was called 'the travelers' room'. This room was famous: it was here that almost all the murdered guests had slept.

"You aren't afraid," Scheffer chuckled, on opening the door; "but then, of course, nowadays only honeymooners come here."

"That is true of us."

"Oh, then I won't worry about you," he replied; "you won't have any bad dreams! Have you any luggage?"

"No, we left it at Soleure."

"It seemed to me that this detail irritated him. That may have been an idea that I invented later. Later, I also remembered that he eyed Maria-Luce's bag, the jewels she wore, and even the big ring I wore, very keenly. But I won't swear to it. He did it very quickly before leaving us. Outside it was still pouring, but the thunder had stopped.

2

"IN THE FADING light of the day, this room seemed a very peaceful retreat to us. It was large and clean, with light, flowered wallpaper; a big bed with white sheets, and an enormous red eider-down quilt, a comfortable Morris chair, the mantel decorated with bouquets of orange blossoms, under a glass globe, and two pictures taken from Monsieur de Chateaubriand's *Atala and the Last of the Abencérages*, the subject of which I explained to Maria-Luce.

"We'll be very comfortable here," she remarked, "and if you were nice you'd have a fire built on the hearth and we'd dine together in our room!"

"Good idea. I'll go right down and tell our landlord."

"I'll come with you!" she cried. "You're not going to leave me alone in this room?"

"Ah! it bothers you just the same. . . ."

"Heavens, yes, when I think

"Very well, come along, and don't think!"

"We were at the head of the stairs in front of the door of the attic when we heard the Italian's voice.

"But this isn't a room!" Antonio was exclaiming. "It's a garret! It's a dirty hole! . . ."

"It's the only thing I have to give you," the innkeeper answered. "I have already explained that my other room is taken!"

The door opened and we found ourselves face-to-face with the two Italians and the innkeeper.

"Ah, you again, signor!" the tenor exclaimed. "You must admit that we are out of luck."

"I could not stop a smile. I had caught sight of an iron bed in one corner of the attic which was stuffed with all the dull, rusty articles that one is accustomed to store in such places.

"In fact," I answered, "this is not a very comfortable place to sleep in, especially when one is accustomed to a certain amount of luxury. Do you know what I would do in your place? Now that the coupe is free, I would leave with the diligence!"

"He is right," agreed the signora.

"He is making fun of us!" the other muttered between his teeth.

"I saw that there might be trouble, so I carried Maria-Luce off and went back down into the large, public room of the inn.

"IN SPITE OF the rain, the other travelers had wanted to see the well where the executioners had thrown their victims, and they all returned dripping wet. They ordered hot grog while the innkeeper, still joking a bit sarcastically gave details.

"They probably didn't drink the water from that well — everyone has his little niceties — but the peasants around here did. After all, it didn't matter much, because the Wiesbachs did things neatly. They cleaned their skeletons well. They boiled them for hours and hours in a cauldron that hung from that very pothook!"

"Upon which the travelers asked to see the cauldron, the pitchfork, the axe, and the knife — all the instruments of torture, in fact — that had become famous in this horrible affair.

"They are in the little dungeon . . . and my wife has the key."

"Madame Scheffer, detained at some forester's because of the weather, took her time about returning. The driver announced in the meantime that he was ready to leave, and the room emptied itself in a moment.

"The Italians did not come down until after the diligence had left. They seemed to have made up their minds to make the best of their part in the adventure and ordered dinner. We watched them out of the corner of our eyes, and Maria-Luce was very much amused. I was extremely polite and opened the conversation.

"If I had been alone, I would have given up my room willingly. . . .

"A bad night is soon over,' the Italian answered with a smile.

The woman, whom I'll call Countess Orsino, although I did not know her name at the time, was charming to Maria-Luce. 'We have been cheated,' she said to her. 'This inn is not at all horrible.'

A door at the end of the room opened, and Madame Scheffer, the innkeeper's wife, entered. She rid herself of an enormous coat and hood, and as she did so we could not control the chill of terror that ran up her spines. The sight was worse than horrible: it was sinister. Her hideousness was due mostly to her squinting eyes and enormous, grinning mouth. Aside from that, she had sparkling teeth, beautiful golden hair, and a nose that was a bit thick, with ferociously sensual nostrils. I don't know what Madame Weisbach was like, but

this woman certainly seemed to exhale an odor of blood. She was strong and still young, about thirty-eight, with firm limbs, and hands used to men's work.

"Behind her came the manservant, whom we had not yet seen. He was thick-set, slightly humpbacked, and he limped. A redhead with the face of a brute.

"He threw down the burden he was carrying, and gave a sigh of relief. Then he looked at us in silence and lifted a trap-door under the stairs. He lighted a lamp, which was there prepared, and disappeared down into the cellar, dragging his bundle behind him. The innkeeper was cleaning the dirty wine-glasses and no one had said a word. The three of them had looked at us in silence, that was all.

"I'm frightened this time,' Maria-Luce whispered to me.

"Yes, it's beginning to become more interesting,' I answered, 'but don't get worked up and we'll have some fun out of it.'

"THE INNKEEPER was the first to break the silence after his wife had disappeared into the cellar behind the servant.

"What do you think of my wife?" he asked. 'She fits in well in an inn like this, doesn't she? I couldn't have chosen better! . . ."

"I joined in the game. 'Yes, it's quite a good trick.'

The little countess had retreated into the shadow of her handsome tenor, and he remarked pleasantly: 'Madame Scheffer would be very good-looking if she didn't squint.'

"If she hadn't squinted, I would not have married her," the innkeeper answered. 'Weisbach's wife squinted! And I wonder if you noticed my manservant . . . he's humpbacked and bowlegged like Daniel, the Weisbach's servant. I had to go all the way to Chaux-de-Fonds to find him.'

"Why don't you laugh, Olivia?" asked the tenor, who seemed to be enjoying himself.

"Did they ever murder anyone in the attic?" Olivia gasped.

"Did they ever murder anyone in the attic?" Scheffer exclaimed. 'Well, I should say so! I have all the newspapers if you want to look them over. Daniel slept in the attic and stood guard over the travelers in the other room. When he believed that they were safely asleep, he would knock three times on the floor, and the Weisbachs, who kept themselves in readiness for the signal, came up. . . .

"Sometimes the deed was easily and quietly done; other times there was a scuffle. The woman with the goiter told how Mengal from Breslau, president of the court of justice, defended

himself so well that his wife was able to escape. But on leaving the room, the unfortunate woman rushed into the attic where Daniel always waited, holding himself in readiness to help. He broke her skull in with one blow of the axe. . . . You will see the axel . . .

"How horrible!" moaned the countess.

"Oh, that's nothing," the innkeeper went on, shrugging; 'there are lots of other tales about them that are more interesting than this. And I'm not making them up. There's the one about the beautiful brunette chained down in the grotto. But you ought to reconstruct the scene of the tale for yourselves in the little dungeon, if you are fond of such things! You will also see the pitchfork that the Weisbachs used to caress the little brunnette! . . .

"I felt Maria-Luce's hand tremble in mine.

"Give me a light," I said to the innkeeper, and when I had lighted my pipe: 'Scheffer, you're a dirty fraud!'

"By God, no! What about the inquest? . . . and the newspapers?"

"Possible. . . . But you make me laugh with your axe and your pitchfork! It's as though you told me that the Weisbachs cooked their victims in that pot over there!"

"YOU'RE A shrewd one," he

burst out with a roar of laughter. 'But I found the cauldron I need yesterday. My wife went to pay for it today and the man brought it back with some other little things that won't go badly with the landscape! Yes, it's true, I'm helping the atmosphere along a little. . . . It was my idea. . . . And when everything is just as it was *before*, people will feel that they are back in the times of the Weisbachs. . . . But you must believe! . . . When I tell you that this is the cauldron, this the axe, and this the pitchfork, you must believe, or there's no fun in it. . . . but then you're not an amateur in such things! . . . What I am doing is for the amateurs who specialize in horrors! The fact that it is the actual dungeon, the well, and the inn, is a good start and with a little imagination it won't be hard to believe that the crimes have just been committed . . . without counting the fact that my wife and servant are a stroke of genius! . . . I hope to be rich in ten years. When I think that the people who were here before me had the travelers' room done over and added a drawing room! . . . The fools! As though it were possible to ruin the "Inn of Blood" like that!'

"He sighed and went on, 'You see, I'm not trying to put anything over on you. You're not out for thrills, so I have shown

you the inside of everything. But there are people who would be angry with me if I were to give the show away. There are some, you know, who *love it!* . . . Don't be afraid, little lady,' he said to the Countess, 'if the idea that you are going to sleep in the attic where they murdered that poor woman upsets you, I'll have a mattress put in the drawing-room.'

"'No, we'll sleep in the attic,' Antonio Ferretti declared.

"'Very well. And you,' the innkeeper asked, turning to me, 'does the idea of sleeping in the "travelers' room" bother you?'

"'Not a bit, not a bit! Does it, Maria-Luce?'

"'Oh, the whole place frightens me,' Maria-Luce answered.

"At that, we three men burst out laughing and the women joined us at the end, but only halfheartedly.

3

"MADAME SCHEFFER reappeared out of the trap-door, followed by the servant, and we stopped laughing immediately. Only Scheffer seemed vastly amused by the effect that his wife had had on us. He called out to his servant: 'Daniell' . . . like the other one!'

"He ordered him to wring the neck of two chickens, but Olivia said that she was not hungry and that a cup of bouillon would satisfy her.

"Excuse me, but I am," Antonio protested, "and a chicken won't frighten me!"

"And you?" I asked Maria-Luce.

"Nor me," she answered, squeezing up close to me; "that is the only thing in the house that doesn't frighten me."

"Shall we dine together?" Antonio asked. He had obviously forgotten the incident of the diligence.

"No, thank you," I answered; "I've had a fire lit in our room and my wife and I will dine alone in our quarters."

"It's very nice up there," he replied, smiling. "I have seen the room. You're in luck. I can understand how people sleep there *even at the risk of being murdered!*"

"You are cheerfull!"

"Oh, I'm only speaking of those who were before you."

The innkeeper started to rattle some keys. He had just lighted the lamps, as night had completely fallen.

"While waiting for dinner, I'll show you around. The rain has stopped and we can go to the well, to the grotto, and in the stable."

The women hesitated, but we persuaded them to follow us. The innkeeper went ahead with a swinging lantern; and in the stable, in front of the well, and in the grotto, which was about a hundred yards from

the inn and the existence of which had been ignored for a long time, he reconstructed the whole story — and more. He put in a few details of his own! The crimes of the Peyrebelle Inn were mere trifles compared to the crime of the 'Inn of Blood'!

The Weisbachs had made a sort of crematory oven out of one end of the grotto, and some fragments of human bones, too large to be confused with the bones of sheep, had been found there.

"It was useless trying to be strong-minded; we all came back from that little expedition somewhat upset. We were glad to re-enter the big room of the inn with its cheerful hearth . . . and yet! . . . Yes, but over the fire, two chickens were turning on the spit and filled the air with an extremely pleasant aroma. The bowlegged servant basted them from time to time with their juice, meanwhile polishing up a big leather basin.

"What are you doing?" I asked him.

"He lifted his brute face up toward me and went on with his rubbing.

"Don't ask Daniel questions," the innkeeper said with a little laugh. "It's a waste of time, because he won't answer you. Not that he is dumb, but I have ordered him to be mute like the other, who really was! You understand?"

"Oh, yes, I understand. Con-

gratulations, you haven't overlooked a thing.'

"Nothing. And when the cauldron is on the hearth, you'll see what a sensation I'll make when I repeat the story told to the judge by the woman with the goiter."

"What was that?" Antonio asked.

"WHY, THE STORY of what happened to her when she first awoke to the fact that she was working for very peculiar people. One night when she came in from her washing, she found a roaring fire on the hearth. She went closer to see what they were cooking in the pot, and she lifted the cover; but Weisbach appeared on the run and gave her a blow that sent her reeling against the wall. But she had seen! . . . She had seen a man's head turning around in the bouillon, surrounded by chunks of flesh.

"You see," Weisbach said to her, "curiosity is always punished. If I did what was right, I'd send you to the bottom of the pot to find out what is going on there! But I need you. In the meantime, keep your mouth shut!"

The wretched woman threw herself at his feet, swearing that she would never speak. And she stayed with him, because she knew that they would never let her go alive! From that day on, they talked openly before her,

and there were even some nights when they forced her to help them in many ways. They would tell her to follow them down to the grotto and close the argument by kicking her down ahead of them. . . .

"Come, let's go down there now. It's the best part of the whole place."

"And he picked up his lantern again.

The women exchanged looks; then, catching sight of the bow-legged man who was staring at them covertly while he continued to polish his cauldron, they made up their minds and we went down into the cellar behind Scheffer. A slimy stairway, a greasy cord, weird shadows thrown by his flickering light . . . it was awfull! We soon heard ringing blows like those of a hammer beating against chains. And, as a matter of fact, that is what it was. At the end of a subterranean passage the man threw open a door and we saw another lantern on the damp earth of the vault. Madame Scheffer was crouched on the ground, busy fastening a piece of chain to a ring in the cave wall, from which hung a lantern. At the end of the chain there was an iron collar. She had her back to us and did not bother even to look up, but continued her hammering with the violence of a madwoman. At last she stopped a moment.

"That," the man explained,

I have had to have done. But it's old iron just the same. The marks of the hammer won't show as soon as it has rusted, and some people will be even able to find blood-stains.'

"What a beast!" I murmured; "there is no possible way of being bored with you!"

"No, eh? Nor with my wife! . . . Wait, and she'll give you a thrill. She'll tell you the story of the pretty little brunette who was imprisoned in this cave. It's worth the trouble of listening. . . ."

"You ought to set up your little trick in Paris, Boulevard Rochechouart, near the Cafe of the Yellow-Hammer. You'd be a big success."

"I know," he answered. "I've traveled. There are plenty of fools in the world."

"THE GROTTO WAS not very big. Nevertheless, there was room enough for a little exhibit. An enormous, rusty knife, a saw, an axe, and all the necessary implements for an innkeeper who conducts his business in the way that the deceased Weisbach did, hung from nails embedded between the cracks of the stones. In one place were a pitchfork and an oxgoad; against the wall were some tongs. Some shapeless, colorless rags also hung from stalactites. Once, it seems, they had been clothes, and in another spot was a pile of debris

which included some pieces of old leather, all that remained of some shoes.

"Read my collection of newspapers and you will see that all this stuff is mentioned. I haven't made up a thing. Unfortunately, the police kept all the originals and I had to replace them as best I could!" He laughed and said to his wife, "Go to it; it's your turn now."

"She stood up and came toward us and we shrank back. I shall see those squinting eyes and that big mouth all the rest of my life. And what a setting! The whole was brought into fantastic relief by the fierce, blood-red light thrown by the two lanterns, one of which was still on the ground. It was like a horrible, evil etching.

The woman put out her arms and grasped the pitchfork almost greedily, and as she spoke she glared at the little countess with such ferocity that the other was forced to turn away . . . And what a voice! It was like a sound from hell.

"And yet you know," Schef-fer said to us, "she only drinks her little swallow of brandy in the morning after her coffee like the rest of the world. Good old Annette!" (He called her *Annette, like the other one!*) "You will see what a wonder she is."

"Perhaps one of the ladies would like to try the iron collar," she began. "It doesn't mat-

ter that Madame is blonde: it would be just as effective.'

"But the suggestion was not very well received, and Annette smiled a horrible smile!

"Everyone to his own taste. This is what happened, according to the woman with the goiter. A beautiful brunette arrived one afternoon accompanied by a middle-aged gentleman. They were obviously rich and had lots of jewelry. A mishap to their carriage forced them to take shelter at the inn for the night, and the coachman, who went back to Soleure, was to return the next day with another carriage for them. When he arrived the next morning, he was informed that the two had departed early in the morning and that they had left money for him. He took the amount coming to him and went off without bothering any further about his customers. But his customers had never left the inn

"THE GENTLEMAN, knocked unconscious by Daniel and cut up into pieces by Weisbach, was already in the cauldron. As to the lovely brunette, she was still alive in the little grotto. . . . She lived there for fifteen days, according to the woman with the goiter. Every night as soon as the inn was closed, they went down to see her. They had her chained down there to this iron collar.

One evening the woman with the goiter heard cries and slipped down into the cellar, but Weisbach, who had sharp ears discovered her. He dragged her into the vault. "You want to see?" he said to her. "Then see you must . . . see what will happen to you if you talk." And she saw. . . .

"The lovely brunette was there, completely naked and chained as I have already described. She was just one piece of torn flesh, and Weisbach's wife, now with the pitchfork, now with the goad, was stroking her ribs."

"So saying, Madame Scheffer went into action. And what she was telling was less horrible than what she did! Half bent over herself, with a savage light in her eyes, and that enormous mouth foaming at the corners, she hurled first her fork and then her goad where the chain hung. And she did it with a fire that suddenly ceased to be play and became a kind of madness and wild enjoyment.

"The slut!" she screamed, and the sound of her voice sent a chill up my spine; 'she killed the poor little brunette! like this! like this! and again! and again! She crushed her ribs, tore the flesh, while the walls resounded with the other's cries of pain. "Now you're beautiful! Let your lover come now! Ah,

and this, too. Now you are more beautiful than I!"

"I must tell you," Madame Scheffer said, panting and turning toward us, or rather toward the little countess, who had to lean against the wall to keep from falling. I must explain that Weisbach's wife was as ugly as sin, and she squinted! Naturally, she could not bear the sight of beautiful eyes — so saying Madame Scheffer stared straight into the little countess' eyes — 'without wanting to scratch them out!'

"Let's go! Let's go!" Olivia Orsino cried; 'I won't stay here another second!' And she rushed from the vault.

"We all followed her, and Scheffer, who was behind, said with a great laugh, 'I told you she was priceless! She has learned her lesson well. But don't let it upset you. Aside from that, she is as gentle as a lamb . . . and an excellent cook too, as you will see.'

"And then the woman herself who had joined us said 'So I frightened you? Well, I must tell the story; it will make people come!'

4

"I FELT Marie-Lucie tremble and we were all a little pale when we came back into the big room. We looked at each other and finally burst

out laughing . . . all except the countess.

"What a horrible, horrible woman!" she murmured.

"And with all that, you don't know the end of the story," said Scheffer, jabbing at the chickens with a fork to see how nearly done they were. He stopped the string which turned the spit. They are done to a turn, and with a good salad . . . you'll praise our cook. . . . The end of the story is this: The day when the woman with the goiter was dragged into the vault was the day in which Madam Weisbach scratched the little brunette's eyes out with the pitchfork. She would teach the other to have more beautiful eyes than her own!"

"Squint now, squint now!" is what she shrieked, Madame Scheffer completed, loading herself with a pile of dishes from a large chest.

"Enough," I said firmly, 'we've had enough of an appetizer; let's eat!'

"Do you know what the Italian woman said to me?" Maria-Luce whispered. 'She doesn't want us to leave them. Let's eat down here.'

"Oh no!" I protested; 'I'm sick of these stories and I want you all to myself.'

"We took leave of the other two and I led my wife upstairs. We had a little trouble in finding our room in that strange

hallway. The stairs were so steep that we came near to toppling down them, and it made me think of the Weisbachs. The traveler would go up the stairs while the servant waited for him in the dark at the top and pushed him down to the innkeepers, who were waiting at the bottom. And that was the end of him.

"We, however, were a bit luckier, and, as there was only one room in the inn, we finally found it. But before locating it I opened doors into several other rooms filled with packing-cases and all sorts of debris. I wondered why, in an inn, they did not make use of so much precious space, and while Scheffer was serving us our supper, in front of a good fire and under a tame enough lamp, I could not help asking him for an explanation of this. He answered that it would be a great expense, useless perhaps . . . and finally after hesitating a moment he added:

"Besides it seems to me that the Weisbachs *did not care to have too many travelers at one time!*"

"And he left, after putting a bottle of champagne on the table and wishing us good-night.

"*'DID YOU HEAR?*" Maria-Luce whispered to me as soon as he was gone; "but why does

he want to leave things in the same condition?"

"He hasn't been here long. Give him a chance. You're not going to begin imagining things, are you?"

"By the time supper was over, I had cheered her up again. We had emptied our bottle of champagne gayly and forgotten all about the horrors. We were just about to go to bed when a light knock came at the door . . . There was no bolt in this door, but there was a key and a sort of hook that fastened to a ring in the cas-

"Who is there?" I asked

"Don't open!" Maria-Luce whispered. She was already terror-stricken, for we had made quite an evening of it and might well be supposed asleep. . . .

"Open, open quickly," came a heavy voice which I recognized as the Italian's.

"At that I opened the door and the man threw himself into the room, shutting the door behind him. He was very pale and seemed in the throes of the wildest emotion. . . .

"I've come to warn you," he exclaimed, his voice trembling with emotion. "First of all, we can hear everything they say in the kitchen. These people are murderers. I heard his wife say to Scheffer: "We have nothing to fear. If they find the bones, *they'll think they belonged to that other affair!*"

We're not going to stay another second in this den. I've found a rope in the attic and I've fastened it to the window ledge that overlooks the outside of the house, not the courtyard. Get dressed and follow us!"

"Maria-Luce was already half undressed and I had thrown my coat on the chair.

"This is a fine tale!" I exclaimed, dumbfounded.

"You didn't see that woman's eyes," said Maria-Luce, her teeth chattering with fright.

"Seeing that I was undecided, the Italian lost no time and left us. Maria-Luce was dressing hastily, shaking in every limb.

"Let's go! Let's go!" she begged. "You haven't even a revolver."

"That was true. And besides it was impossible to oppose Maria-Luce. I took the bag, and two minutes later we were in the attic, after removing our shoes to make no noise. The little wooden door of the garret window was open and the cord fastened to the screw of a pulley. The Italians had already gone. We put our shoes on hastily, and it was then that I discovered a little streak of light coming through a crack in the floor. It came up from the kitchen, and I tried to peer through it. I saw nothing, but I could hear Scheffer's

voice say: 'Which one shall we begin on?'"

CHAULIEU HAD reached this point in his narrative, when Captain Michel hit the table with such a blow of his fist that the saucers under their glasses jumped.

"I expected that! What an original story! But in Paul-Louis Couriers tale the innkeeper says, 'Shall we kill them both?' and he was only referring to two chickens! You take us for geese, Chaulieu!"

"Wait a minute, said Chau lieu. "I don't know what this Paul-Louis thing of yours is — I don't know him from the man in the moon — and if you are geese, inform your respective relations of the fact. . . . I'm telling the adventure just as it happened to me."

"Let him finish," said Dorat; "I'll bet he had forgotten all about love when he heard those words."

"Yes, old man, I certainly had, and so had Maria-Luce. And I can tell you we lost no time in making our escape! I made another knot in the cord and grasped hold of it. Maria-Luce, to whom I had given the bag, which contained quite a large sum of money, and our toilet articles, got up on my shoulders, and when we reached the ground we ran for ten minutes without stopping. We started down toward Soleure

by the first path we came to because we did not dare risk the main road. I expected to catch up to the Italians, but we lost ourselves in the pitch-black darkness. Slipping and sliding and falling on the soaked ground, we plunged on madly."

"You were frightened to death by that time," laughed Michel.

"I should say we were. I couldn't even stop Maria-Luce, who thought we were being pursued by bandits ready to shoot us down at any minute. The worst was that it began to rain again — and how! . . . Good Lord, what a night! . . . lost in a forest, torn and scratched by branches, and pelted with the heaviest kind of rain! Never in my life have I ever spent such hours. And I finally had to carry Maria-Luce, who was nothing more than a dripping bundle of rags . . . At last, a light! A peasant's cottage . . . They took us in, warmed us, and gave us a bed. They dried our clothes for us, and in emptying my pockets I found a piece of paper with a few words written on it in pencil:

"Thanks for the room. I leave you the coupe."

"I would have sworn it!" exclaimed Captain Michel. "You must be a fool."

"Wait a minute," Chaulieu

said again. "I haven't finished! You can well imagine what a temper I was in over this stupid joke, which considering Maria-Luce's condition narrowly escaped being criminal. . . . It was no use rubbing her; she stayed as cold as ice. During the night she was taken with a high fever and I sent to Soleure for a doctor. It was two days before we were able to leave those kind peasants.

5

"I HAD HAD enough of Switzerland and we returned to Mourillon the shortest way possible; but, alas! the good southern sun was not enough to cure Maria-Luce. She had always told me that her lungs were not very strong, and from that day on she began to cough. And when at last, a few years later, she stopped coughing, she was dead."

Dorat coughed at that to show that he was still very much alive.

"Listen, poor old Chaulieu," he said, "we're all sorry, but as far as Maria-Luce's death is concerned, it is a misfortune which might have occurred under entirely different circumstances, after a damp walk in the woods for example. The truth of the matter, as far as your story goes is that they played a roten joke on you, that's all."

"No!" Chaulieu growled; "not at all . . . *The story only begins to be interesting from now on!*"

"The following year the Italian papers, and finally newspapers all over the world, were full of the disappearance of a man and a woman. And that is how we knew that our two Italians had been Antonio Ferretti and Countess Olivia Orsino. If we had had any doubts, which was impossible because the resemblance between them both was perfect, we would have been convinced by this fact: that they had been traced as far as Soleure, and there the trail ended!

"When Maria-Luce and I learned of this we looked at each other in silence, and the same terrible thought struck us both. The unfortunate pair had wanted to make fun of us. They had hidden in a corner of the hall and after our departure had slipped into our room, where the Scheffers had murdered them in *our place!*

"Well, what do you say to that?" he asked, enjoying the astonishment of his friends. "Not so bad, eh? Wait . . .

"Remembering all we had seen and heard in the vault, and especially Madame Scheffer's frenzied illustration with the goad and pitchfork, we became more and more convinced that these people had gone from pretense to actuality . . .

I mean to say, they had carried the reconstruction of the crimes of the 'Inn of Blood' to the finish!

"Do you remember," Maria-Luce said to me, "do you remember how she stared at the countess?" Here Maria-Luce shivered and went on, "It was terrifying! One might have believed that the countess was already her prey, chained to the wall like the "pretty little brunette" . . . and that she was scratching her eyes out with the pitchfork! Ah, poor wretches! The ruffians may have tortured her, too, for fifteen days, having already cooked Antonio. And when I think . . . when I think that if it hadn't been for that trouble over the coupe, they would never have played that trick as a revenge! . . . It was we who . . .

"Don't think about it," I exclaimed. But the matter could not rest there. Maria-Luce had nightmares about it at night, and so did I. At last, to get rid of the obsession, we did our duty. We returned to Saleure, and our first move was to go directly to the police, where we told the whole story from beginning to end.

"AN INQUEST followed which brought immediate results. All the details we gave, all the incidents just as they had happened before our eyes, were confirmed . . . And the

Scheffers did not deny a thing. They did not seem in the least phased by it. And yet there were several questions which might well have embarrassed them; but Scheffer had an answer to everything.

"For example, when the judge asked: 'What did the words Monsieur Chaulieu heard mean: "Which one shall we begin on?"' he answered quite naturally: 'How do I know? How do you expect me to remember what I said that evening any more than any other evening? My words were of no importance except to the two who thought I was going to murder them. What stupidity! Perhaps they had something to do with the next day's work. I couldn't say . . .'"

"But the judge insisted: 'How was it that you and your wife weren't astonished when only two people came down the next morning? Why were you silent about that? We would never have known a thing about all this if Monsieur and Madame Chaulieu had not come themselves to tell us that they fled in the night!'

"Why should I be astonished?" Scheffer answered. "You know the little show we gave and still continue to give for amateurs. It had frightened the little lady, and she can tell you herself that several times during the evening, she said: 'The whole place frightens me!'

No, I was not surprised, and I must admit that we had a good laugh over it when the two Italians told us the next morning, before leaving, that Monsieur and Madame had been frightened to death and had escaped by the attic window . . . Besides, we found the rope there. . . . As for the Italians, after the abrupt departure of Monsieur and Madame, they had carried their bedding into the other room and had passed an excellent night there."

"Still, if the incident was as funny as that, you had no reason to keep still about it!"

"But who told you I did? On the contrary, I've told it scores of times to travelers stopping for a drink . . . But to find them now . . ."

"You might have said something to the stage-driver."

"Oh, when he stops at the inn he has other things to do: he is busy with his horses. Besides, he may have heard my tale, at that."

"No, he has never heard it. . . . He never suspected a thing."

"That is quite possible. What should he suspect? . . . That story is a trivial matter. You surprise me with all this fuss."

"The Italians didn't tell you that they frightened Monsieur and Madame in order to obtain possession of the room?"

"Good heavens, no."

"The answer was a serious

one, because after all, if the whole thing had only been a joke it was strange that the Italians had not boasted of it before their departure.

"I am the only victim in the whole affair," Scheffer went on, "because I have not been paid for the bill yet. And that is probably why the Italians did not confess that they were responsible for the flight of the other two: they did not want to be asked to pay for the bill."

"As you see, he had an answer ready for everything.

"NEVERTHELESS, the judge was perplexed and the inquest continued for some time. They made new searches, but they found nothing and the matter was finally dropped. It was not until three years later, a year after Maria-Luce's death, that the affair came to light again, and this time the papers were full of wild tales.

"Antonio Ferretti and Olivia Orsino had never been heard of again, and you must admit that it was strange. I know that Antonio Ferretti was married and that he may have gone to some far corner of the earth to enjoy his happiness under an assumed name, but, after all, he was just becoming famous, and to give up such a splendid career forever! . . . I grew more and more convinced that they had been murdered, and even today after a lapse of over

twenty years I am positive of the fact.

"But I was saying that three years later something new occurred. In excavating not far from the inn, some new bones were found, and you can well picture the stir that it caused. The Weisbachs were on everyone's tongue again. And the Scheffers had become famous overnight, as famous as the Weisbachs had been! The experts, however, did not agree on the age of the bones.

"In the meantime, first one, then two, and then three families who had had disappearances among their relatives, claimed that they might quite possibly have been victims of the Scheffers, because they had taken a trip through French Switzerland. They went so far as to establish the fact that a young man from Linz, who had abducted a girl of good family, had slept one night at the "Inn of Blood". At that, the Scheffers and their servants were arrested and I was called as one of the witnesses.

"Their guilt seemed established and there was no doubt that they would be sentenced when we suddenly learned that the young man in question had married the young girl of good family in America, and that they were farmers in Minnesota! The Scheffers were acquitted. . . . And now my story is done."

"And nothing more was ever heard of the Italians?" Dorat demanded.

"Never."

"And the Scheffers are still going strong?" Captain Michel asked, and this time he was not joking.

"Yes, they are still there making money. I heard of them quite recently from a friend who passed through Soleure. The 'Inn of Blood' has become historical. People came from far and near to see it; only no one ever asks to spend the night in the 'travelers' room!"

BOOKS

COLONEL MARKESAN and less pleasant people by August Derleth & Mark Schorer

Arkham House, Publishers; Sauk City, Wisconsin 53583;
1966; 285pp; copyright 1966 by August Derleth; \$5.00.

Here are seventeen stories by this pair of youngsters who later became well known in a larger literary frame, Derleth as an author of regional novels (the Sac Prairie saga), Schorer for his biography of Sinclair Lewis. Both are Guggenheim Fellows, and both are known for much more than the specific items listed above.

The stories in this collection were written mostly in 1931, some earlier, and later appeared in *WEIRD TALES*, *STRANGE TALES*, and *STRANGE STORIES*, between 1930 and 1940. Several of them have been adapted for television, and the version of *Colonel Markeson* which starred Boris Karloff (*The Incredible Dr. Markeson*, if I recall correctly), was particularly effective. The changes did not harm the story in the least, and in at least one particular enhanced it as a horror tale.

These stories, as Mr. Derleth points out, were written strictly for entertainment; and on that level, I find them all successful, though some are less effective than others. I'd give top rating to

(Turn to page 35)

The Other

by Robert A. Lowndes

MY FRIEND, HIGGINS, lost his reputation one night in 1937. For as long as we had known him, Albert Higgins had never once been late, never missed an appointment. But that night he did not take the plane to Bermuda, and when he arrived on the next plane, he had no explanation.

We were glad he had missed it, for more reasons than one — his punctuality was something inhuman, even if he did have a tendency to be considerably

earlier than necessary when he was about to travel — but we wondered what had happened. Higgins was a different man after that; he was still generally punctual, but I think he made himself late deliberately now and then, as if to avoid falling back into a habit he had foresworn.

Last night, without any prompting, he told me the story. Why he picked me, I'll never know — perhaps because he thought it would make good

Can a man be haunted by a grisly apparition
of — himself?

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material for me, and for some reason, he didn't seem to mind whether it got around.

He had arrived at the airport that night, he said, even earlier than usual; he'd been idling as pleasantly as possible in a bar near the airport, sipping martinis and listening to the radio.

He was nearing bottom on the third when the stranger came in. He happened to be looking in the bar mirror, and his first impression was that the man had just seen a ghost. The stranger was white, snowy white, and taller and thinner than most. His hands were trembling; he leaned against the wall a second, then slouched forward and flopped into the chair opposite Higgins..

"Narrow escape," the stranger — Higgins never did get his name — murmured weakly and a little breathlessly. "God, I was almost on that plane!"

"Can I get you a drink?" that the pale man was momentarily incapable of ordering. He nodded, mumbled thanks, and drained the glass at a single gulp as soon as the waiter had set it down.

"I'm really sorry," he said. "I suppose I'm intruding . . . but I've had a shock. The Bermuda plane, you know; I nearly took it."

"But it isn't due to take off

for another half hour," protested Higgins.

"I know." The other's breath was coming a little more normally now. "You see — it's rather odd — but, what I meant was: I nearly got caught. Fate. Half an hour margin, yes, but suppose I hadn't caught on when I did? Then I'd be on that plane when she takes off." He paused for a moment, lit a nervous cigarette, then leaned forward confidentially.

"I just learned that that plane won't reach Bermuda! Maybe a storm will hit it, or the engines fail. But it's doomed. . . . All on board lost . . . well, perhaps not all; some survivors, perhaps, but not me."

"I beg your pardon?" said Higgins.

"Of course. You don't believe me. Few people do . . . You're not booked on it yourself, are you?"

"I am."

"Then I'd better tell you the whole story. I've told it before, and it's usually been laughed at. Though those that didn't laugh, I think, are rather glad of it. You see — I'm psychic. I suppose that's what you'd call it."

Higgins began to smile, but the man was not even looking at him. He was talking to his own reflection on the glazed tabletop.

"THE FIRST time I remember anything like it was when I was swimming one day. I was about thirteen at the time. Summer day, clear sky, lazy hot sun. Everything was all right, when suddenly I thought I saw someone in trouble about a hundred or two yards from me. It was strange, you see, because it wasn't a public beach and I hadn't seen anyone about. It was a boy — I couldn't see his face — and he was threshing about, apparently in pain. He went down before I could get to him. I dove under, looked all around the spot, but there was nothing to be seen. And the water was perfectly clear and not much over my head. It scared me so that I swam ashore and went up to the cabin.

"I didn't go in the next day, either. And about an hour before lunch, when I was ordinarily to be found in the water, I was taken with an acute attack of appendicitis. The pain doubled me tight; if I had been in the water I wouldn't have had the beginning of a chance to be saved."

The stranger looked up and lit a new cigarette from the stub of his old one. "That was almost twenty years ago. It didn't happen again for almost a decade, and, at first, I didn't connect the two.

"But when I was twenty-one

and a senior at N. Y. U., I lived in a ramshackle, old-law rooming house trying to live on not enough money. It was summer, or almost, and the place didn't seem to be too bad. One particular day I was walking a blonde co-ed through the park, demoralizing the squirrels with peanuts, when I got the impression that someone was following us. Ever had that feeling sort of crawl in the back of your mind? I looked around, but no one was in sight; still, I couldn't shake it off.

"We dropped into a Chinese restaurant, and I still felt someone following. Everyone around seemed perfectly busy with their own affairs, and I didn't want to attract undue attention. My girl felt that something was wrong, too, but I didn't want to tell her. I felt like a fool . . . It kept recurring, all that night, particularly when we went to a movie. I could have sworn that somebody was staring at the back of my neck, someone I knew. But the seats directly behind us were vacant.

"On the way home it came again. I could even hear the footsteps. They were familiar to me, but not reassuringly so. Finally I stepped into a doorway, hoping it would pass by and I could see it. The night was rather misty, but I saw something.

"It moved slowly, and, as it

approached, I could see why. It was black and charred, a hideously burned thing. I saw the blackened lips and ruins of a face. It passed by, but, when it was just before me; it turned and looked squarely at me. Nothing was human but the eyes. *They were my eyes!*

"I didn't go back to my room that night. I wanted company. I stuck to the always-populated streets around Thirty-Fourth, near Penn Station. But I went to the room the next day after classes and there I got an inkling of what it was all about. The fire department was still poking around what was left of the place; full details in all papers; nine people incinerated."

"A PREMONITION," said Higgins. "A damnable gruesome one, but a premonition nonetheless. Had them myself."

"That's right," agreed the stranger. "It was a premonition. Solidified. I swear that the cinder I saw walking was as solid as this table.

"Well, I haven't had an important accident or sickness for twenty years. I've had a dozen narrow escapes, but each time, one of these visions came a little bit before. Once I was going to take a train, the Allerton Flyer: you probably read what happened to it. But the day before, I met my double, horribly crushed and mangled. I was

warned away from 42nd Street the January day when five people were killed by ice falling from the Chrysler and Chanin towers. I met a frozen zombie of myself in the Rockies one fall and stayed indoors through a sudden cold snap.

"I've always been warned in time, so far, but the escapes have grown narrower, closer."

His voice went down to a whisper. "You see, at first, at the very first, I had a margin of over 24 hours. I nearly punked out, at that. Then, afterwards, it was nearly always ten or twelve hours leeway. And today . . ."

"Today?" repeated Higgins with a cold feeling at the back of his neck

"Drowned! A cold, drowned corpse with fish eaten face and a strand of seaweed in its hand. I saw it just a minute or two before coming in here.

"I've got it figured out: my time's running short. Today, there was only about half an hour's warning. Next time it will be less. Then, one day . . ."

He shuddered and took a quick gulp of the drink before him. "I'm all right now," he said. "Sorry to have troubled you my friend; should be used to this now — but it seems I'm not." He stood erect. "A new lease of indefinite duration. I'm not taking that clipper today, and I hope you're not." He

waved his hand friendlily and walked out.

Higgins felt like a corsage of idiots that night after he'd cancelled his booking and was trying to enjoy a musicale. Imagine

being taken in by a tale like that!

But the next morning, when he went out for his paper, he saw, before crossing the street to the sidewalk stand, that there were huge, black, screaming headlines.

BOOKS (continued from page 30)

Spawn of the Maelstrom, *The Pacer*, *The Lair of the Star-Spawn*, *Colonel Markeson*, and *The Return of Andrew Bentley*. Some of the others I have not had time to re-read recently, and one I've missed completely (*Eyes of the Serpent*); but I do recall enjoying most of them the last time around.

The rest of the titles in this volume are: *In the Left Wing*, *The Carven Image*, *The Woman at Loon Point*, *Death Holds the Post*, *Laughter in the Night*, *The Vengeance of Ai*, *Red Hands*, *They Shall Rise*, *The Horror from the Depths*, *The Occupant of the Crypt*, and *The House in the Magnolias*.

I find there are five stories which I'd need to refresh my memory on, in addition to the one to be read for the first time. This, at the very worst, would make a possible six misfires out of seventeen. But eleven stories of which I'm sure, as to entertainment value, are sufficient to justify a recommendation of the volume.

It may sound superfluous to assure you that the book has a fine dust jacket with effective artwork by Frank Utpatel, and is well bound and attractively printed — but remember that every review of an Arkham House book will be a possible introduction to a number of people who have never heard of AH before. And the fact that a worthy standard of production is being maintained never becomes superfluous information. RAWL.

The Door of Doom

by *Hugh B. Cave*

THE GREAT mansion, rising out of the depths of the moor before me, seemed to be a thing endowed with life-in-death. In spite of the immense height of its crumbling turrets, it seemed to be crouching with outstretched arms, waiting for me to come within reach. I stood there in a clump of stubble, staring at it uneasily.

For the better part of an hour I had been groping my way across desolate miles of barren country, through the enveloping darkness. Back in the little village of Norberry, where I had inquired my way, the native Britons had peered into my

face and cringed away from me, muttering maledictions and whispering among themselves. The tottering old innkeeper, as ancient and as wise as the moor itself, had seized my arm in one trembling hand and pointed off into the lonely, terrifying expanse of wasteland that lay before me.

"There ain't nobody lived there for years," he mumbled. "It's the house of the undead, it is. Ain't nobody ever goes there, neither tradespeople nor travelers. Folks passin' near in the night-time has heard horrible things — things that ain't, by no manner o' means, human.

The "Deathless Four" defy a macabre threat,
as each in turn opens the mansion's grim
Iron Door.

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January 1932; no record of copyright renewal.

Voices from the grave, they be,
singin' death chants. . . .

Now, having trudged my weary way across the moor and finally arrived before my destination, I hesitated to step within reach of those ancient walls. Yet I feared the ridicule of my comrades more than I dreaded this repulsive, malignant pile. With heavy feet I groped the last hundred paces. Passing through the stone gateway, I climbed to the topmost step and let the iron knocker fall into its worn grooves.

Above me the twisted walls of the house hung in a menacing mass, resembling nothing so much as a giant vampire bat with outflung wings. Behind me, as I stood there, lay the flat, bleak expanse of scrub through which I had come.

THE DOOR swung open as I waited. For thirty seconds I remained motionless, staring over the threshold into the slanted, expressionless, deep-rimmed eyes of the Oriental servant who had opened it. Then the servant said softly, "Who are you?"

"Captain Reed," I informed him. He drew the great door a foot wider and flattened against it to permit me to pass.

"You go inside," he said impassively. "The others, they are all here, waiting for you."

I let him lead the way. As I paced along behind him, hardly

surprised that his sandalled feet made no sound on the thick carpet of the hall, I glanced about me and shuddered.

I had not expected this sort of thing, even after the three-hour drag on a once-a-day train and the four-mile tramp across an untraveled moor. Perhaps I should have been somewhat prepared, knowing the peculiar whims and idiosyncracies of James Lamoran, and after listening to Rojer Macon's quiet exclamations in the Army and Navy Club the preceding afternoon. Yet of all the possible places for the annual reunion of the Deathless Four, this was certainly the most dismal that Lamoran's acute imagination could have conceived!

Worse than that, Lamoran had actually taken a two-year lease upon this structure, and intended to live here. Macon had run across him in Soho, and learned the news; and then latter, in the smoking room of the club, Macon had chanced upon David Pell and me, and passed the word along.

"What kind of a place is it?" Pell had demanded, and both he and I leaned close to catch every word.

"What kind of place? Precisely the sort of place you'd expect it to be, old man, when Doctor Jim Lamoran rents it! Lamoran wouldn't live in a *house*, you know. He has to have a haunted graveyard or a ruined

abbey replete with vampires and all the necessary embellishments. I haven't seen the place, of course; but Jim informed me that it's out Norberry way, sunk in the center of the deadest, blackest, loneliest stretch of moor in Cheshire. It's been there, he says, for half a million years or so, allowing for exaggerations. At any rate, it has neither date nor postmark on it."

Now, as I trailed silently after the corpse-faced Oriental, I began to feel that Macon's dry comments were more fact than mockery. Moreover, I could hear Macon's modulated voice emanating from a closed door at the far end of the corridor along which I paced.

"He'll be here," Macon was saying. "Eddy Reed might be late once in a while, but he always arrives eventually. I don't envy him his walk across the moor at this hour."

"Quite possible," this in Lamoran's voice, "that he thinks we're all quite mad. He probably asked directions in the village, and listened to the fantastic tales that surround this place. He'll be here, though."

THE ORIENTAL opened the door. I stepped over the threshold into a huge reception chamber where my friends were seated at one end of the long table. Instantly the three faces turned toward me, as the Oriental droned my name. Then, scram-

bling out of their chairs, Macon, Lamoran, and Pell swooped down upon me, making me welcome and besieging me with questions.

A strangely mingled feeling of joy and sadness came over me at that moment, as they led me to the table. We four had been through the Great War together, side by side, from start to finish. We alone, of the members of a certain squadron of the Royal Flying Corps, had returned to tell of the horrors. They had named us—the newspapers and the men of the Army and Navy Club—the "Deathless Four," and we in turn strove to perpetuate the memory of our companions by coming together at least once each year for twenty-four hours of companionship.

We were a strange lot, and yet the chains which bound us together have bound many a stranger group of men under the same circumstances. Doctor James Lamoran, the oldest among us, was a tall, finely formed gentleman of infinite knowledge, eternally studying some intricate phase of occultism which happened to meet his attention. Pell was the portly, altogether prosperous banker. Rojer Macon, our youngest member and hero, since he had brought down more enemy Fokkers than the rest of us combined, was once again a smiling, irresponsible sportsman of

the blue blood — happy-go-lucky, devil-may-care, and ready for anything with a tinge of adventure in it!

As for myself, I am an American. My father and my father's father were soldiers before me. It is in my blood. In the spring of 1916, despairing that my countrymen would ever see action in the great combat, I threw my lot with the R.F.C. Now tonight, fourteen years later, I found myself sitting here in this most sinister of ruined houses, in company with the three dearest friends I had in the entire world.

"Why," I demanded of Lamoran, "did you lease this ghastly house?"

He smiled before he replied. Then, "You asked your way in the village?"

"Yes, of course."

"And you heard nothing?"

"I heard enough to send me back to London as if all hell and the devil were on my tail. The yokels hissed at me and whispered like gibbets, calling this place the . . ."

"The House of the Undead, eh?"

"Yes." I shuddered.

"Maybe they're right." Macon grinned. "Ever since we got here I've been hearing the most gruesome creaks and groans and . . ."

"Where did the Chinese chap come from?" I demanded, ignoring his banter.

Lamoran's eyes narrowed very slightly, as if I had touched upon a vital point. He looked straight at me and said simply, "That I don't know."

"What? You mean you didn't bring him?"

"He was here when I came, Reed."

"But they told me in the village . . ."

"That the house has been uninhabited for fifteen years? That is true."

"Then how the devil," Macon exclaimed, "did the fellow . . ."

"People who have lived in this place," Lamoran said quietly, "have either vanished utterly or have fled in terror. Off and on, for many hundreds of years, the house has been abandoned. For the past fifteen years it's been empty. And yet . . ."

HE STOPPED to light a cigarette, shrugged, and finished softly, "When the estate agent escorted me here to look the place over early last week, the door opened in our faces and Tai-tse-Kiang stood on the threshold to welcome us!"

"That's his name?" Macon scowled.

"Yes. Tai-tse-Kiang."

"It's really explained of course," I suggested. "The fellow was out of work in London, heard you intended to take over this place, and slip-

ped in before you to sort of establish himself, eh?"

"On the contrary," Lamoran smiled, "he says he has been here — always."

"What?"

"Always."

"But that's pure rot!" Pell sputtered, rubbing his hands together.

"Perhaps. We shall learn the truth in due time, I dare say. Meanwhile . . ."

Lamoran stopped speaking. The service door at the opposite end of the hall had opened abruptly, and Tai-tse-Kiang was pacing mechanically forward with four wine glasses on a tray. I had an opportunity, then, to see the fellow more closely and in a better light, though the light, of course, consisted of nothing more inspiring than a massive candelabrum suspended by an iron chain from the ceiling.

Unquestionably, there was something peculiar about the man's stolid face. The eyes, in particular, harbored no definite light or color; they were like the eyes of a dead creature, with a suggestion of some filmy substance masking the pupils.

He said nothing as he placed the glasses before us. When he had finished, he retired quietly and closed the connecting door. Lamoran glanced at me, smiled queerly, and lifted the glass to his lips.

"To our less fortunate companions who cannot be with us tonight," he proposed, rising to his feet. Then, under his breath, so that only I, who was closest to him, could have heard it: "And to the succeeding events of this evening of madness!"

We sat down again. Lamoran pushed his empty glass aside and bent forward.

"I have a bit of a treat for you, and for myself. As yet I've not made a complete inspection of my new home. Tonight, with you three to accompany me, I propose to do so. There are rooms and rooms and rooms; half a hundred or more of them. What they contain I haven't the vaguest notion. Perhaps we shall find something, eh?"

"Maybe we'll uncover some ghosts," Macon grinned.

"So our ace of aces believes in the supernatural? Not you, Roier!"

"Well . . ."

"A place like this," Pell said eagerly, "ought to contain some pretty valuable art treasures. That's my hobby, you know. Oriental stuff, in particular. If your everlasting Chinese weren't so infernally alive, I'd stuff him and put him in my London house, Lamoran!"

"Good! And you, Reed?"

I grinned. "Ready for anything, providing we all stick together. I don't believe in

ghosts unless I'm left alone. Then I'm like the rest of humanity. I don't say there aren't any, because some damned thing might overhear me or read my thoughts and swoop down to offer proof that there are."

Lamoran laughed easily. Rojer Macon, too, began to grin; but the grin vanished with uncanny abruptness. He was sitting nearest the service door. I saw him stiffen suddenly in his chair and twist about as if something had brushed past him. His laugh ended in a gurgle.

I confess that I did not see the thing take place. I was busily staring at Macon at the moment, wondering what had come over him. Then Pell's rasping voice brought me about again.

"My God, what's this!"

Pell and Lamoran were both peering at the table top. Macon, too, lifted his head at that hoarse outcry and looked in fascination. There, lying on the silken cloth precisely in the center of the four empty glasses, lay a flat square of white paper, with written words scrawled over its surface! It had *not* been there before!

"Something — something brushed by me!" Macon whispered sibilantly. "I felt it!"

PELL SAID nothing. He

reached out with nervous fingers to pick up the paper; then withdrew his hand and licked his lips. Lamoran, more calm than any of us, lifted the thing and read the message aloud:

"The Iron Door on the lower corridor must not be opened. All other rooms in the house are yours; but the Iron Door bars the secret of the Master, and death is the penalty for intrusion. There will be no other warning."

Lamoran let the paper fall again. The last word he had uttered — the word *warning* — seemed to hiss in a double crescendo through the chamber in which we sat.

"Where did it come from?" Pell said huskily.

"Something went past me, I tell you!" Macon muttered again.

"Nothing came into the room," I said feebly. "Yet, the paper was not here when Taitse-Kiang brought in the wine."

Lamoran's critical glance passed from Pell's face to Macon's, then to mine, and finally back to the damning sheet of paper. Suddenly, with thin lips and hands clenched, he lurched to his feet, scraping his chair out from beneath him.

"Kiang!" His voice seared across the room with the intensity of a lash.

The service door opened

slowly. Once again the Oriental paced forward with automatic steps, looking neither to right nor left. He came to a motionless stop in front of the man who had summoned him.

"Yes, sir?" he said unemotionally.

"Did anyone enter this room just now?"

"No, sir."

"Where were you?"

"Outside the door, sir, in the event that you called."

"This bit of paper," Lamoran said stiffly, "was dropped on the table less than five minutes ago. Have you ever seen it before?"

He jabbed the paper abruptly into the man's hand. The Oriental glanced at it, nodded, and passed it back.

"It has been given to every new master of this house, sir, for the past thousand years. Many have disobeyed it, and died."

"How do you know that?" I demanded.

"I have seen them go, sir," he said, turning to face me.

"How long have you been here?" I pressed, trying to smile knowingly at Lamoran.

"Always, sir."

"Always, is it? How old are you?"

"I was born," the Oriental said quietly, "hundreds of years before the coming of Christ, at the time of K'ung Tsze and the Chon dynasty. It was I

who assisted K'ung Tsze, whom you call Confucius, to inscribe the *Ta Hsueh*. I was, and I am the servant of him who rules the universe."

THE MAN was mad. There was no other plausible explanation. Lamoran, however, insisted on putting further questions, evidently for the purpose of confounding him. Lamoran knew more about the ancient Chinese lore than any of us.

"What is this *Ta Hsueh*?" he demanded.

"It is the third of the four books, sir. The first is *Lun Yu*, K'ung Tsze; the second is the *Book of Mencius*, a disciple of K'ung Tsze; the third is the *Ta Hsueh*, dealing with social and political matters; the fourth is *Chung Yung*, a thesis on conduct written by K'ung Chi."

"Hm-m. And where did you work with Confucius?"

"In the city of Chung-tu sir, when the master was made magistrate in the year 498 B. C."

Lamoran nodded, with a half concealed smile, and waved the fellow aside. Turning about with a positive lack of expression, the Oriental retraced his steps to the service door, and passed through.

"Stark mad," I shrugged. "Else he thinks we are utter fools."

"What he said about K'ung Tsze — was it right?" Macon

demanded. "It's a bit over my head."

"It was right," Lamoran admitted. "However any educated Chinese could supply the same information."

"And this infernal paper?"

"That," Lamoran said darkly, "is beyond me for explanation. Unless . . ."

But he left the thought unfinished. Thrusting the paper into his pocket, he turned about with a dry laugh and said, "Come on. Let's have a look at the place. For the time being we'll just let the Iron Door alone. The rest of the house ought to provide enough to keep us occupied."

We walked into the main hall together. Lamoran led the way, with Rojer Macon pacing close beside him. Pell and I stepped into the gloomy corridor with our shoulders rubbing, and Pell, leaning close to mutter into my ear, said significantly, "It's a damned hoax, Reed, instigated by that bloody Chinese. He's got something in that room that's worth money — some priceless art piece or something. I tell you, I'm going to have a look before I leave this place!"

I grinned at that. It was like Pell to be belligerent about such an affair. Whenever Pell's nose caught the scent of an art secret, nothing in heaven or hell could hope to keep him quiet!

The hour was long after mid-

night when we finally returned from our tour of the immense structure. We found nothing; nothing, that is, beyond a most amazing and confusing labyrinth of unused passages and abandoned rooms. The house was constructed in four tiers, with a narrow, evil-smelling tower leading up from the rear. Only those rooms on the lower floor were furnished and revealed any signs of recent occupancy; and of those, only the library held any interest for me.

We were tired and, I imagine, somewhat disappointed, when we filed into the reception chamber. Once again Tai-se-Kiang fetched drinks for us.

"I suggest we turn in," Lamoran said quietly. "I, for one, am about done for."

"A sign of weakness," Macon grinned. "You should ask the Chinese how he remains awake for five hundred years!"

"You, Reed?"

"I'd like to have a look at the library," I confessed. "I'll turn in later."

Lamoran stood up, emptied his glass, and nodded.

"Felt that way myself" He smiled. "I think you'll find something—interesting. Try the right hand shelf against the farther wall, second from the bottom."

I stared at him. He laughed, then turned away.

"You can take one of the candles from the candelabrum

here," he suggested. "The sleeping chambers are on the next floor. I pointed them out to you, you'll remember."

He went out then, with Pell and Rojer Macon groping after him. When they had gone, I lifted one of the candles and, holding it face-high before me, prowled through the tomb-like corridors to the library door.

The library itself was a room of huge dimensions, lined completely around with shelves of dust-covered volumes. My boots made rather a thump-thump as I paced across it toward the particular section which Lamoran had mentioned, since the highly polished floor — dusty, of course, but solid nevertheless — was for the most part uncarpeted. A circular rug lay before the dead fireplace, supporting two deep leather chairs. Farther back stood a claw-legged table. Other than that there was nothing.

THE UNSTEADY sputter of the candle cast my shadow in grotesque outlines before me as I advanced. I remember looking back and noticing the almost fantastic footprints, like the trail of a ghost-creature, made by my advance. There was another line of them, as well, leading in and out of the room, caused, no doubt, by Lamoran's boots when my host had been here before me. Beyond that the dust was un-

broken. I went down on my knees beside a row of stolid bindings and set the candle on the floor.

I intended to have a look at Lamoran's significant shelf first, then seek the books I had come for. In short, I was eager to learn more of the history of this gaunt house and the strange folk who had inhabited it. But as I leaned forward, drawing out one of the large volumes, I saw that my own quest and Lamoran's suggested books were one and the same. The volumes he had told me to have a look at, because they would excite me, were the very volumes I desired to examine!

I opened the book at random, scuffling the pages under my thumb and shifting the candle so that it might throw a better light. In a little while I came upon the following.

"Lord Burgell . . . mysteriously vanished during the hours between midnight and dawn. The servant, Tai-tse-Kiang, who had been a devoted guardian of the family for sixty years or more, discovered that Lord Burgell was . . . missing. This occurred on December 4th, 1732."

I read it again, quite unable to believe what I had stumbled upon. Tai-tse-Kiang — 1732. It was impossible! That would make the man more than two hundred years old!

It was, I reasoned, not the same man. Perhaps another of

the same name, but most assuredly not the same individual who had poured wine for the four of us less than half an hour past. Many English families kept their servants for generations and . . .

My head came up with a sudden jerk. Behind me, the library door, which I had cautiously closed upon entering, had swung half open under the pressure of some freakish draft from the outside corridor. Nevertheless I turned on my knees, with my shadow projected on the floor in front of me like a prostrate bat, and watched in fascination.

Then my blood chilled. I heard footsteps—heard them as distinctly as I heard the throbbing of my own heart—and yet there was no living thing within the radius of the candlelight! The book remained clutched in my hands as I crouched rigid. Step by step, mechanically, with deathlike rhythm, the unseen thing advanced across the floor toward me. Then, very abruptly, it halted. The hellish feet were directly beside me. Whatever it was, it stood above me.

I would have moved—would have lurched to my feet and fled from the room in terror—had not the next occurrence happened with such terrifying swiftness. The book was snatched from my fingers and replaced in its niche. A second book was drawn from the shelf, flung

open, and placed in my rigid hands. Something indistinct, like a thin pencil of fog, indicated a line halfway down the left hand page.

My eyes fixed automatically on the indicated line, and I read the words. I remember now that the page was done in script, not in print, and that the book was incredibly old. I saw only two things: the name Tai-tse-Kiang and the significant date 1247. Then I heard a soft, throaty laugh at my shoulder, and the book was returned to its place.

HAD I wished to then, I could not have risen to my feet. My body was numb with something akin to complete horror. I know that the footsteps receded across the floor with that same damned tread. I know that I stared after them and saw nothing. Then the door swung shut, clicked, and I was alone.

For an eternity I remained there. My face must have been a ghastly color, stained with sweat. I do not know. I do know that I trembled violently with a sense of cold more intense than any I have ever experienced in the highest roof of the heavens. I do know that when I finally got to my feet, the candle had burned itself to within an inch of the floor, and only a flickering stump, with hanging wick, remained.

I had to walk slowly from the room, in order to keep that

feeble light alive. The darkness, had it overwhelmed me at that moment, would have brought a scream from my dry lips. And I noticed one thing more as I paced across the floor—that the thing which had crept upon me, and thrust that infernal book into my hands, and laughed at me, had left no footprints in the heavy layer of dust.

When I closed the door of that room of horror and turned back along the corridor to go to my own chamber, there were but four tracks of footprints marring the even surface of the library floor. They were the impressions of my own boots, one set trailing in, the other trailing out, and the older prints made by the boots of James Lamoran.

I SLEPT but little that night. My room was a small one, with a single window and only one door, which opened on the narrow corridor that ran along the second-floor landing. The chamber was stuffy, yet, I dared not leave the door wide lest that unnamed, formless inhabitant of the house should creep upon me. I did not stop to reason that if the thing were truly of another world, a closed door would hardly hinder it — in fact, would only hinder my own escape. When a man is afraid, he seeks to confine himself as securely as possible.

I cannot say how many hours

passed before I heard the thing approach. Perhaps two, perhaps three—but no more. This time, when the footsteps drew near along the corridor, they came, not from the direction of the stairway, but from the opposite end of the passage, where lay the rooms of my companions.

I lay quite still, flat against the wall, my fingers twisted around the wooden bedposts in preparation for the sudden leap that would bring me upright. Outside, those hellish footsteps came nearer and nearer — now at the door of my room — now hesitating before entering.

My nerves were on edge. I think I should have screamed to the high heavens if my door had opened at that instant. But the door remained closed. The footsteps began again, moving away, continuing to promenade down the passage. I heard them descend the great staircase; then they grew softer and softer and finally passed from the realm of my hearing.

For another long moment I lay tense. The footsteps did not return. I waited for an eternity, and nothing disturbed the complete silence of the house. In the end, I think, I dropped into a fitful sleep.

I dreamed that I heard a sing-song voice, an Oriental voice, moaning a soft, faraway chant. The sort of monotone that one hears occasionally in distant China, in the temples of

Confucius or the shrines of Lao-Tze. After the ordeal I had gone through, the chant was soothing and almost beautiful.

MORNING came eventually. The warm sunlight, streaming in a straight line across my bed from the oblong window, woke me. I looked about me then, at the mellow friendliness of the chamber, at the flat, shimmering expanse of moor outside, and laughed at the fears that had gripped me. I lighted a cigarette, dressed without haste, opened the door of my room.

There were footprints in the passage. They were my own, of course, and Lamoran's and Pell's and Macon's, made by us when we had climbed to our rooms on the previous night. I did not expect to find the prints made by the feet of the invisible thing that lurked among us. There were none in the library; there would be none here.

Lamoran and Macon were awaiting me in the reception chamber, which room had been set aside as our dining room. Pell, evidently, had not yet come down.

"Did you—inspect the bookshelf I recommended?" Lamoran said dryly.

I nodded.

"I want to talk to you about it," I said.

"Yes? I think I know your

questions, old man. I don't know the answers."

"What answers?" Macon demanded, frowning at the one-sided conversation.

"Nothing, Rojer. A little historical matter. Where the devil is Pell?"

"Not down yet?" I asked.

"No. He's not used to staying up nights, I reckon."

"Want me to drag him out?" Macon proffered.

"Well — yes. You might as well."

Macon left us. We sat down, Lamoran and I, and I looked at him quizzically.

"I found the books," I said. "While I was reading one of them, something came into the library and lifted it from my hands, and laughed."

He didn't smile. On the contrary, he leaned abruptly forward, scowling at my words.

"Something?" he said slowly.

"Something," I shrugged, "is all I can call it. It possessed a voice; it made audible footsteps; yet it had no substance and left no prints in the dust of the floor. I heard it again after I had retired. It crept along the corridor, paused at my door, then descended the stairs."

"I wonder . . ." Lamoran said grimly. "Reed, do you know anything about the supernatural? That is, beyond the imbecile ideas of the ordinary layman?"

I WAS about to answer him,

about to say that I knew something of Eastern forms of life after death, embracing vampires, mafui, voodoos, and some obscure claims of India's interior, when Rojer Macon returned. Macon's voice, flung out of a crimson, excited face, stifled my reply.

"He's gone! Pell's gone!"

Lamoran stiffened abruptly in his chair. I half rose, then fell back again, staring at Macon's excited, trembling figure.

"What are you saying?" Lamoran demanded in very curt, precise words.

"He's gone, I tell you! His bed hasn't been slept in!"

Lamoran's hands clenched on the edge of the table, crumpling the cloth in their grip. I saw his face lose color and his eyes dilate. He got to his feet swiftly and stood to his full height, with one hand still holding the table.

"Come with me, Reed," he said grimly. "I think I know."

I followed him. Rojer Macon, trailing along behind me, muttered and sputtered to himself in an undertone, demanding to know where we were going. Lamoran said nothing more. I thought I knew our destination, but I was in no mood to offer explanations.

We passed through four narrow corridors, all of which we had traversed the night before. At the end of the last one we turned aside and entered a pas-

sage which was strange to me. I noticed a single line of footsteps in the dust, leading us deeper and deeper into the gloomy abyss of the great manse.

Finally we reached it: the Iron Door designated in that ghostly message which had been flung upon our banquet table the preceding evening. The trail of footsteps led directly to its massive barrier, and there ended. Lamoran swung about with a grim military precision and faced me.

"You heard the — thing — descending the stairs last night?" he demanded.

"I did."

"The thing you heard was Pell. He came here."

I nodded heavily. Lamoran was right; there was no argument. I watched with a strange sense of foreboding as Lamoran flattened himself against the door and seized the latch.

The door was immense. It filled the entire end of the corridor, forming a block of ancient, solid iron more than eight feet in height and at least five in width. How thick it was we could not guess. The latch securing it was as heavy and thick as a bludgeon; it was so ponderous that Lamoran found difficulty in raising it from its grooved runway.

"Give me a hand," he grunted.

I moved forward to assist him. There was room on the

bar for both of our hands without crowding; yet, in spite of our combined exertions, we could not raise the thing from its grooves.

Lamoran stepped back, wiping his sweating hands on his trouser legs.

"Damned thing is locked somehow," he grunted.

He surveyed the door bitterly, as if he would have liked to smash it down.

"Hadn't we better call out?" I suggested. "If Pell is locked in there . . ."

He nodded. Flat against the door, I called Pell's name in a loud voice, shrill enough to penetrate beyond the barrier. Then I waited—we all waited—for a reply. There was none, unless—was it my imagination, or did I actually hear that same uncanny, mocking laugh that had terrified my senses in the library during the preceding hours of darkness? No, it was not imagination, for as I turned quickly to confront Lamoran I saw him whirl about, with a snarl on his lips, to peer at Rojer Macon.

"What the hell are you laughing at?" he snapped.

"Laughing?" Macon muttered, recoiling. "Good God, Jim, I didn't . . ."

It came again, cutting into Macon's mumbled protest. Rojer stopped short, with ashen face, and fell back against the wall. Lamoran took a step forward,

hesitated, and raised his arm savagely. I did not move.

"The same thing," I said heavily, "I heard last night."

FOR A FULL moment no movement passed between the three of us. We stared blankly, fearfully, into each other's tense faces. There was nothing, absolutely nothing, in the corridor with us. Yet those two successive laughs had come from our midst, mocking us, from somewhere within reach of our hands!

Lamoran's uplifted hands fell slowly to his sides. He turned about. His face had faded almost to the bleached whiteness of Macon's. Then, very suddenly, he snapped at me, "Get away from that door!"

I moved quickly, with my eyes fixed on him. The instant my body was away from the barrier, he flung himself forward. His thick-set shoulders crashed against the metal with the force of a flung battering ram.

The sinister door withstood his attack without so much as a protesting groan. The very force of his onslaught hurled him away from it. He tried again and again with the same lack of results until, holding his shoulder in pain, he staggered back and leaned against the opposite wall of the corridor.

"Nothing — but dynamite — will move it," he gasped.

He seized my arm abruptly.
"We've got to get some!"

"But—it will take hours."

"Damn it, man, don't you know the truth of this thing yet! Some infernal supernatural force is at work in this house. Pell is in there, under its influence. We've got to get him out!"

"There's a train at noon, from the village," I said weakly, realizing that we could not possibly obtain an explosive nearer than London. "I could leave at once and make it back here by midnight, on the late train."

"Not you. I need you here. Macon!"

"I'll go," Rojer said curtly. "By God, that's more in my line—action. I'm nothing but a damned parasite if I stay here."

"It's dangerous," Lamoran frowned. "There's the moor to cross. It'll be pitch black, full of pitfalls."

"I'll make it," Macon said grimly.

"Good! Get enough of the stuff to blow this infernal door to hell!"

Royer nodded silently. Without a word, he turned his back on us. We stood there, Lamoran and I, beside the door that barred its dread secret, and watched our companion hurry down the passage.

When he had vanished, Lamoran said dully, "We can't do anything here, Reed, until he returns. Suppose we give the

house a thorough once over, top to bottom, and pray to God we find something to work on."

We made a systematic job of it, as we had been trained to do in the army. Starting at the tower, we searched every nook and crevice of the upper floors, every abandoned tunnel, every blind room. We found nothing in those upper recesses, except the marks of our own footprints of the last evening. It was far into the afternoon when we reached the ground floor again.

There, in the reception chamber, we found Tai-tse-Kiang, the stolid Oriental, methodically arranging the table for our delayed luncheon. The sight of food, I think, took some of the grotesquery out of our souls and made us remember that we were, after all, human beings in human surroundings. We sat at the table and devoured the stuff in silence. More than once our glances met in strained silence. More often we found ourselves staring at the empty chairs which had so recently held the jovial grinning faces of Pell and Macon.

The meal over, we scoured the lower floor and the horrible, inky-black pits of the sunken cellars. Here again we found nothing; nothing but the inevitable silence and darkness which brooded over the entire manse. When we finally groped up the stone steps from the pits, night

had fallen and the servant had dinner ready for us.

We began it in silence. From the dead, resigned glare of Lamoran's eyes, I did not in the least expect any such outburst as developed. But develop it did, when the Oriental servant was bending over Lamoran's shoulder.

Lamoran reached up suddenly to grip the man's arm. "You know what happened here last night?" he snapped.

"I have guessed, sir," the Oriental shrugged.

"Do you know the reason?" "Yes."

Lamoran swung a livid face upwards. The entire affair had whipped all sense of reserve and all desire of caution out of his system. He was completely, thoroughly angry at that moment. "What is it, then?"

"The other man, sir, dared to disobey the warning which was given you. This is the house of the Master. The Iron Room is the room of the Master. He who enters — also dies."

"Damned rot!" Lamoran snarled.

"You are speaking sacrilege, sir. Confucius . . ."

"To hell with Confucius! And with you! Of all the blasted, infernal . . ."

Tai-tse-Kiang listened impassively to the most furious, livid outbursts of vehemence that I had ever heard pour from Lamoran's lips. I knew, well

enough, that Lamoran possessed a temper and a goodly store of invective, but never had I heard him release it with such crimson hate. In the end the Oriental said, very softly, "That is worse than penetrating the Iron Door. The Master has ears — and hears."

Then he straightened up and backed away, releasing his arm from Lamoran's grip. As he came erect, the light from the hanging candelabrum illuminated his entire face; and I shuddered at the glittering, half-subdued cruelty in his eyes.

"That," murmured Lamoran, when he had gone, "will probably bring results, Reed. I'm going to turn in. Macon won't return before midnight, even with the best of fortune, and when he comes, we'll need steady nerves for the task ahead of us."

He rose from the table.

"You have a revolver?" he said suddenly.

"Yes," I said. "In my room."

"Better join it — and keep it warm," he smiled dryly.

WHEN I left Lamoran and retired to my own room on the second landing that night, I did not remove my clothes. Perhaps it was the knowledge that I had, at the most, only two hours or so of available sleep. Perhaps it was the subtle premonition that something

would happen even before those two hours had elapsed. At any rate, I threw myself on the bed without removing a single article of my garb. In fact, I added an extra burden. I removed the automatic from my luggage and dropped it into my coat pocket.

I did not attempt to sleep. My thoughts mulled about in confusion. First the malignant face of Tai-tse-Kiang persisted in rioting through them; then the Iron Door in that half buried passage almost directly below me seemed to loom out of the darkness and mock me. Again I had visions of Rojer Macon groping across the blackened moor in the dead of night with his significant burden. And then, climaxing this series of nightmares, I heard something.

At first it was merely a whisper; then it increased in intensity until I recognized it as being a continuation of the soft, almost lovely Oriental chanting that had penetrated my dreams of the night before. This time, however, I knew it to be no dream, but reality. And rather than lie in my chamber, pondering futilely over the cause of it, I slipped from the bed, obtained a tiny pocket flashlight from my bag, and crept to the door.

The sound came from below. I tiptoed along the passage to the head of the great ramp,

and there hesitated. I felt, then, something religious in the monotonous tone of it. It possessed the same quality of tone that I had heard more than once in far-away India, where the cowled priests of the Buddhist temples stand upon their flat housetops, with their followers kneeling in the streets below, and offer sunset prayers to their god.

I descended the ramp very quietly, making no sound that might interrupt. Following the intonations, I passed along the lower corridors, feeling my way in the dark without having recourse to the flash-light in my hand.

So I came at length to the corridor of the Iron Door. Even as I entered the mouth of that dismal tunnel, the chant ceased. I, too, stopped — and waited. A door opened in the pitch-like gloom far in advance of where I crouched. I heard footsteps, moving away from me. I followed them. They led me through a second series of short passageways to the head of the chill, black stone steps that twisted down into the pits. Undaunted, since I had traversed this same route during the afternoon, I continued.

My boots might click on those bare steps, I considered. Therefore I removed them; and as I went from step to step, deeper into the depths, I made less noise than a shadow. Far above



(illustration
by Wesso.)

me hung the doorway. Before me, as I reached the bottom level of the old house, extended that sinister labyrinth of subterranean pits and tunnels which Lamoran and I had so carefully inspected earlier in the day.

My unsuspecting guide was still ahead of me. I could hear him, and I guessed now his identity, for he shuffled along with an ominous scraping

movement of sandal-shod feet. The man was obviously Tai-se-Kiang.

DOWN HERE it was cold, with a penetrating chill that crept into my very bones. I hardly noticed it, so intent was I upon keeping track of my quarry as he paced through the network of interwoven ways. For perhaps three or four minutes I continued to

creep after him, and then the sound of his progress ceased.

He was, I knew, in the most remote room of the cellars. This particular room had but one means of ingress, since it was the final chamber in a twisting chain of pits. I advanced silently to that opening and flattened against the stone. Then I saw him — or saw his indistinct form.

He crouched beside the opposite wall, twenty feet from me. His hands were uplifted. He had pushed aside a portion of the wall, revealing a secret niche which Lamoran and I had not previously discovered. Even as I watched, the Oriental slid forward with catlike grace, and vanished within the opening.

Again I waited. I saw nothing. I heard nothing except a half inaudible rasping sound, as of metal grating against metal. Then, with the same sinuous movement, the Chinese reappeared and reached up to replace that section of the stone which hid his alcove from prying eyes.

I had barely time to secrete myself before he turned. Luckily, the wall beside me was irregular with protuberances, and I was able to pack myself into one of them. Almost before I had become motionless again, the Oriental shuffled past me, returning the way he had come. He looked neither

to right nor left, and the light was so obscure that I could make out no detail of his features. This time, however, he walked with quicker step. Before many seconds had passed, he had vanished again.

I remained in my hiding place until I could be certain that he would not hear me. Then I slipped out and drew the catch-latch on my flashlight. With the beam of yellow playing upon the floor at my feet, I advanced toward that mysterious section of wall which I had seen moved aside.

I found it. The stone slab was, to all appearances, a part of the solid whole; yet, when I discovered the correct inch upon which to exert pressure, it slid back under my fingers as easily as a square of wood. Evidently it was nicely balanced with counterweights.

Before me lay the hidden niche. Perhaps five feet across it extended, and it could have been no more than two feet in depth. It contained nothing more, at first glance, than a long iron lever which extended down through the stone ceiling.

I inspected the thing cautiously, without touching it. I was in no mood, just then, to put my hands on anything I did not fully understand; and this peculiar stick of metal, protruding from the roof of

the alcove, was seemingly inexplicable.

But was it? It was connected, evidently, with the room above it, on the main floor of the house. I strove to remember the plan of those upper corridors. I tried to organize, mentally, the many rooms and passages over my head. And then, like a sudden cold shock, I knew the meaning of this iron rod. It hung directly beneath the door of the Iron Room!

IN ITS PRESENT position, more than three feet of it protruded below the ceiling of the cellar. Had it been pushed up to its full length, it would have extended into the very center of the Iron Barrier, forming a lock which no mortal could hope to shatter! This, then, was the thing which had baffled Lamoran's attack. This thing, crude and almost aboriginal in design, was the lock of the Iron Door!

Still I did not touch it. The Iron Door had been locked securely. Evidently the Oriental, with some fiendish plan in mind, had come here to release the lock. Now that the door above me was open, there was nothing left for me to do but go at once to Lamoran's chamber and tell him.

I turned about to step out of the niche. The light in my hand played its beam at my

feet. My groping foot struck something soft, yielding. I stared down — at a human leg.

For a moment I stood rigid, frozen. Then, gulping down my fear, I dropped to my knees and peered into the narrow fissure which concealed the rest of the limp body. I stared into the dead, upturned face of Rojer Macon. I stared at the strangler's cord which still encircled Roger Macon's dead throat.

After that, with the flash quivering like a cobweb in my groping hand, I ran back the way I had come.

How long it took me to reach the stone stairs leading to the main floor, I am not sure. I know that I stumbled into blind passages and scraped the skin from my hands and tore my clothing and was altogether like a blind bird in a trap. I know that I fell while climbing the steps, and was on hands and knees when I reached the upper passage.

Then caution possessed me again. I began to realize that this was no time for blundering, blubbering fear. If I were to warn Lamoran in time to prevent further horror, I must be quiet as a ghost and as soft-footed as a cat. I dropped the flashlight into my pocket, drew my revolver, and crept noiselessly along the corridor in the overwhelming darkness.

I would have to pass the Iron

Door. That thought alone terrified me. Yet it would have to be faced, if I were to reach Lamoron's room on the upper landing. Consequently, I trod, eventually, into the fatal corridor.

The dread passage was no longer in abject darkness. One of the candle-brackets, set at wide intervals in the grim wall of the tunnel, had been recently ignited. It sputtered perhaps a dozen yards from me, filling a certain portion of the corridor with an unearthly globule of sickly yellow pigment. I noticed, too, that only one of the brackets had been lighted, and that one was the particular candle that cast its glow directly upon the surface of the Iron Door. Obviously the Oriental had traversed this passage before me, and had created the light for some uncanny reason of his own.

I CREEPT toward it slowly, with the utmost caution. There was no telling when Tai-tse-Kiang might return and find me here; no telling the consequences if such a discovery were to occur. Thus I had proceeded no more than half the distance to the Iron Door when a sudden, unexpected footfall caused me to hurl my bent body against the wall and flatten out like a clinging bat. Far in advance of me, at the very mouth of the corridor, I saw

a shadowy outline of an approaching figure — a figure which came forward with dead, mechanical steps toward me and toward the door.

I watched it in fascination, until it entered the realm of light. Then, to my horror, I saw that it was James Lamoran!

I should have cried out to him, warning him, had not the expression of his tense face choked the words on my lips. His gaunt head was outthrust, his hands hung lifeless at his sides; his body was a stiff, rigid thing that moved as if some exterior force were propelling it. His eyes were wide open, unblinking, and ghastly livid in the glow of that infernal light. He was not conscious, not awake. Either he was walking in his sleep — a thing which I had never known him to be guilty of — or he was under the influence of a somnambulistic trance brought upon him by hypnotic powers.

Trembling, but fascinated beyond power to move, I crouched in my place of hiding and watched him. He went straight to the Iron Door, stopped before it, and raised his dangling hands to seize the latch. The iron rod lifted easily in his fingers. The great barrier swung slowly, ponderously inward with a rasping screech. Like a mindless automaton, Lamoran paced over the

threshold into the forbidden chamber, and the massive portal rolled shut behind him.

I heard the latch click as the door closed. I lurched from my place of concealment. I stumbled blindly forward, with a half uttered, choking cry of delayed warning. My fingers twisted about the iron rod and strove to lift it.

The thing was fast again; immovable. Though I am no anemic weakling, I could not stir the latch from its grooves. In desperation I flung my entire body against the barrier, hoping to do what Lamoran had been unable to do on that other horrible occasion.

The result was the same. The door flung me back again, and again, and again. I pummelled it with my fists, kicked at it in my stockinginged feet, Then as I fell back with a sob, I was aware of the automatic clenched in my fist.

Savagely I jammed the muzzle against that mocking lock and jerked the trigger. Three bullets thudded into the metal, into the narrow, slot-like opening which held the iron rod. The roar deafened me. I heard a rasping clash of metal, heard a heavy, significant thud under my feet as my bullets released the counter-balance and let it fall into the death-pit in the cellars below.

The Iron Door creaked open under the weight of my body.

WHAT HAPPENED from that moment on, as I staggered over the threshold, is a maze of distilled horror. It occurred with such rapidity that I can but vaguely recall it.

I saw my companion ten feet before me, his back toward me, pacing lifelessly across the stone floor. Beyond him I saw a towering, inhuman form with two glittering, greenish eyes that had the power to drag me forward.

The thing was a monstrous idol — a squatting, deformed image of the heathen Confucius. Its huge, vividly colored arms were crossed derisively over its flat chest. Its head was outthrust on a sinewy neck. Its bare feet were curled fiendishly together, like talons. And there, prone upon the floor before it, lay the lifeless figure of the man who had been missing since the previous night. Pell!

All this I saw in the feeble light that penetrated from the outer corridor. It burned itself into my memory in the space of a broken second. Then I knew, instinctively, that Lamoran had been lured into this chamber by the formless specter of the House of the Undead. The idol, squatting before me, held some terrible power of death; and Lamoran was being forced toward it!

After that, I acted. Lunging to one side, I lifted the gun in

my hand and jammed the trigger until the chamber was empty. I fired in madness, in positive hate. I aimed at the very center of that leering face.

The effect was instantaneous. The features, rotten with age, crumpled under the impact of four bullets. Lamoran, groping toward it, twitched suddenly as if with the ague, and became motionless. Then I was running forward, the smoking automatic still gripped in my hand.

He would have fallen had not my arm gone about his middle. As it was, he sagged down on my shoulder and could not speak for a full minute. I felt the cold sweat on his white face, felt his body quiver. Then he lifted his head limply and murmured, "Thanks, Reed. You — were just in time."

I WAITED until he could stand erect. In another moment he got hold of himself and I was relieved of his dead weight. He turned slowly to examine the horror room.

"I was lying in my room," he said bitterly, pacing toward Pell's dead body, and speaking to me in jerky phrases, "when the thing came. Footsteps — in the passage outside. My door opened. No one there. A strange force, hellishly hypnotic, took hold of me. Tried to fight it. Couldn't. It led me

here. God knows what would have happened."

He was on his knees beside Pell.

"Good God, Reed," he said suddenly. "Look here!"

I groped to his side and stared down. There had been enough horror already; I will not attempt to describe Pell's body. Enough to say that some sharp instrument — a hideously long knife or sword — had slashed it nearly in twain, from skull to abdomen.

"Nasty," Lamoran shuddered. "Ugh! How the devil . . ."

He straightened up suddenly and stepped forward to the huge idol. I saw him poke his fingers into the shattered head. He grunted with satisfaction and called to me.

My bullets had scored four irregular holes in the thing's flat forehead, about an eighth of an inch apart, on an almost perfectly straight line above the eyes. Below that, the center of the face had crumpled in, revealing the tip of an ancient long-sword which extended, apparently, the entire length of the idol's bulk. Looking closer, I saw a narrow, significant slit running perpendicularly through the mass.

"Favorite trick of the ancients," Lamoran said raspingly. "There'll be a square flagstone in the floor under Pell's body. The victim walks toward this damned thing, steps on the

stone. Pressure releases a counterweight or spring of some sort. The sword flashes down and out through the groove, cleaving the intruder from head to foot. I'd — I'd have got it when I knelt beside Pell just now if your bullets hadn't put the thing out of order. Ugly death!"

He turned away heavily. His tired face was beginning to regain its normal color; but mine, I think, must have been as white as a death's-head.

"The thing . . ." I said brokenly, "the thing that led you here, that inhabits this horror house. What is it, Jim? If we don't learn . . ."

"I think I know. Help me get Pell to the reception hall."

We lifted Pell between us and carried him to the door. As we crossed the threshold, Lamoran glanced significantly at the shattered lock and looked at me in bewilderment.

"You had to shoot your way in here?" he demanded.

I told him of the counterbalance in the cellar, and of Rojer Macon. I knew then how this infernal door was operated. Once opened, to admit a victim, it had the hellish power of locking itself as soon as it swung shut again, and could not be released until that crude balance in the pit was reset. A simple enough mechanism in itself — worked with ordinary weights and counter-

weights — but a device that had caused more than one unholy death in the darkness of the idol's chamber.

In silence we bore Pell to the reception hall. There we placed him on the long divan and decently covered his twisted body with an embroidered silk robe. Finally Lamoran turned to me.

"I've gone pretty deep into occultism, you know," he shrugged. "What I have to tell you is not mere twaddle."

"It is — truth?"

"I will tell you what I know. In many of the secret cults of China and India, it is believed that every true idol of K'ung Tsze or Confucius is inhabited by the deathless spirit of one of the Master's disciples. The man who originally constructed this house — you'll find this fact in one of those books in the library — was an English nobleman who spent most of his time in the interior of China. When he came here, he brought the Confucian image with him. He himself was a member of a cult known as the K'ung Shah, now extinct. He obtained the idol in one of the most ancient temples of the Orient. He also brought with him a Chinese servant named Tai-tse-Kiang."

Lamoran glanced at me. I said nothing, waiting for him to continue.

"That is all."

"Do you mean," I muttered, "that Tai-tse-Kiang is an 'undead', that he is one of the Master's disciples, inhabiting the thing we have just destroyed? Good God, man, it is imposs . . ."

"Nothing is impossible."

"But such a creature, with the horrible power of assuming human form, the power of life-in-death . . ."

"I think you will find," Lamoran said quietly, "that the power has been destroyed. The unseen specter of this House of the Undead was last known to be in my chamber, where he came to exert his influence on me. If you will go there, you may find the reason why Tai-tse-Kiang so jealously guarded the Iron Room from destruction."

I groped to the door, confounded by his words. His own voice was almost hypnotic at that moment; it was the voice of a man who had delved deeper — far deeper — into such matters of eternal mystery than most mortals dared even to think. Mechanically I climbed the great ramp to the upper floor and paced along chamber.

There I stopped, and an involuntary cry came from my lips. Tai-tse-Kiang, the Oriental servant, lay full length across the threshold, with his face staring upward in death.

The lower part of that face had crumpled in decay. The forehead, smooth and flat, was punctured with four bloodless bullet holes.



A Matter of Breeding

by Ralph E. Hayes

THE HUNTER had been lost almost an hour when he finally stumbled into the clearing, ragged and tired. In the center of the open area crouched a small cabin, a crude, primitive, log-and-mortar place with a wisp of smoke lofting from a crumbling stone chimney. Beyond this lay a cornfield, then there was the entanglement of woods again. The hunter's face sagged with relief when he saw the cabin, and the raw edge of panic that had subtly crept over him, when he knew he was lost, now was swept away. He approached the cabin with renewed vigor, and in a moment was standing before its rough-hewn

door. And then, quite unexpectedly, the voice came from behind him.

"I'll take your gun, mister."

The hunter turned to confront another man, an elderly fellow with a thick gray beard, dressed in overalls, an old felt hat, and heavy Army shoes. The old man carried a double-barreled shotgun loosely under his right arm, and its muzzle looked hardly less ominous than the small, hard eyes that stared coldly from beneath spidery brows.

The hunter looked absently at his rifle. "Oh, I'm sorry if this thing put you on edge." He smiled, leaning on the gun against the frame of the door-

The old man greeted Bensan as the answer to his heartfelt prayer — and so the hunter was!

way. "The name is Benson. Out driving deer with a bunch of guys and got separated from them. Hate to admit it, but I was getting a little scared, not finding my way. I sure was glad to see your cabin."

The old man did not speak immediately. He just stood there looking at Benson, his hard little eyes scanning up and down the length of the younger man, and the way he did it made Benson feel uneasy; the shotgun remained targeted on him.

The old fellow looked beyond Benson to the woods behind him. "You sure you're alone?" he said quietly.

Benson didn't know why, but he had the most compelling urge to run. He looked side-wise at his rifle, leaning against the cabin and wished he had not given it up so readily.

"Yes, that's right," he replied, speaking more slowly and deliberately than before. "Like I said, I'm lost. All I want is the direction back to Scottville. Can you help me?"

"The Lord has showed his goodness this day," said the old man, seemingly to himself, but averting his eyes to the autumn sky. "Do you hear that, Voices? The Lord is with us."

A CHILL crept along Benson's spine as the old man's voice died away on the cool breeze that now played across

the long grass of the clearing. The old man was buggy. And Benson had given up his gun without question. Well, he wouldn't try to get it back; he would get out of here and forget the rifle.

"Well, I'll be on my way," Benson said, starting away from the cabin.

"Where do you think you're going, mister?" came the old man's voice. Benson stopped and turned slowly. "You ain't leaving just yet, are you?"

Benson's face became tight-lined as he stood surveying the old man for a moment before speaking. The danger he sensed a moment ago was now becoming very real. "Why, yes," he said casually.

"Without your gun?" the old man remarked, waving his own weapon toward the other one.

"Oh, the rifle," said Benson, relaxing a little. He took a step toward it.

"Keep away from it," said the old man, and he raised the shotgun a little.

"Well, you said . . ."

"I said you didn't have it," said the old man coldly. "Raise your hands, mister."

Benson complied. Suddenly he found himself wishing very hard that he had never seen the clearing and the cabin. "Look," he said, "you keep the rifle. It's a gift. I just want to get back to my friends."

"You ain't going nowhere,

mister," said the old man. "You just open that door there and step on into the cabin."

Benson found some courage. "Now look here, damn it, what do you want from me? If it's money, you can have all I've got on me." He reached for his hip pocket.

"Don't want no money," said the old man. "I just want you." He grinned wickedly through a strong set of yellow teeth, and motioned toward the cabin door. "Move," he said, and he wasn't grinning any more.

Benson didn't see that he had any choice. Reluctantly he shoved the door open and preceded the old man through it. Inside, he squinted in the dim light as the old man shut and latched the door behind them.

The cabin was lighted by two kerosene lamps and the only window was covered with a dirty piece of burlap. The interior was larger than Benson expected, with a rough wood floor and an enormous fireplace that took up most of the opposite wall. When Benson's eyes grew accustomed to the poor light, he saw that there was a person, apparently a woman, sitting beside the fireplace in a rickety straight chair, gazing into the low fire. She seemed not to notice them at first, but when she did, Benson stopped dead, and stared.

He could see her more clear-

ly now, and the sight stunned him. She was a grotesque creature, a dwarf in stature with an oversize balloon head that wobbled slightly on her shoulders when she turned toward them. The eyes were saucer-like in a leathery, wrinkled face, and drool slobbered from the lower lip of a crooked mouth. Slowly her eyes focused on them, and then an idiotic smile came across the face, and she was staring at Benson with a stare such as he wished he had never seen. Then she attempted to speak, and the jaw worked a moment before there was any noise at all, and when it came it was a slur of gibberish that was completely unintelligible. With an awkward movement she got out of the chair and faced them.

"It's me, Sary," said the old man loudly. "Look what I got." Then, to Benson: "She ain't just right."

SLOUCHING AND scraping across the room, she approached Benson, not taking her eyes from him. Cold sweat beaded his forehead now as she drew closer, and in a moment she stood next to him, making gutteral noises.

"That's right, Sary," he said. "I told you the Voices had been talking to me. Talking and telling me we was going to have a streak of good luck. The Voices said to pray for ten

nights in a row, and I did, and now look what we got."

Benson froze rigid as the creature put a hand on him, and ran it along his arm a few inches, looking up into his face. He winced under the touch.

"She's just taking stock, mister," the old man grinned. The shotgun was still on Benson. "Take this and tie his hands, Sary," he added, handing her a short length of rope from a nail on the wall.

Benson looked quickly toward the old man. "Look, I don't know what you want from me, but I give my word I'll make it worth your while if you'll just let me go," he said, as the thing called Sarah hopped back of him and bound his wrists. "What do you want? Just tell me!"

"I told you before," the old man said evenly, "we just want you." He watched closely as the rope was tied. "Now, just set there in that chair," he said, pointing to a straight chair beside a table in the center of the room. Benson looked a moment at the shotgun, and sat down. "Now tie his ankles," the old man concluded, throwing her another piece of rope.

Sarah knotted the rope about his ankles, and Benson discovered that she had amazing strength for her size. The rope sunk into soft flesh and cut off circulation.

"Now you can poke up that

fire," said the old man, whereupon the creature executed a little hop and clap, grinning hideously, and shuffled over to the fireplace. As she fumbled about there, the old man sat down across the table from Benson, and placed the shotgun between them.

"The Voices always put me right," he said, this time to Benson. Benson merely stared at him dumbly.

"This time they told me about you, stranger. They told me I'd find you, for Sary" He gestured toward the fireplace, and again Benson felt a chill.

"She's different from most folk, I know, and not much pleasure to look at, but she's my flesh and blood, my only child. I got to do my best to take care of her."

BENSON'S FLESH pricked as he thought of what the old man might have in mind for him. Could it be that he wanted a playmate for his misshapen offspring, a lover?

"You see, Sary's needs are different from yours and mine, mister, and I have to minister to her wants. The Voices, they tell me how, so I always listen to them."

Benson had regained a little composure, and decided to talk along with the old man, so long as he wanted to talk to him. It might help somehow. "Do the

voices speak to you often?" he ventured.

"Didn't used to," said the old man. "But now they talk more regular. Used to talk about me and Sis, before we come here to live together. Used to talk about my sex, and about me going to stay overnight with Sis. Then, people talked about me, too. Everywhere I'd go, folks would be looking at me, watching me, and talking about me. And then the Voices would come and tell me the people was evil. The Voices don't talk about me and Sis no more, not since we had Sary, and that's near twenty years now."

"You mean you and your sister . . ."

"Yep, we had us a daughter. Sis and me, we think the world of her." He glanced toward the covered window. "It'll be dark right quick now, and Sis will be back from town. She goes once a month, you know. You got that fire going good, Daughter?"

Sarah looked up and pointed to the blaze she had kindled.

"She's right handy at building a fire," said the old man pensively. Then, slowly: "Like I said, she's always been hard to care for, though. From the time she come into the world she was hard to feed. She just wouldn't take milk, even when newborn, and by the time she was ten she stopped eating veg-

etables. Yes sir, she was downright hard to provide for, even then." The old man took a plug of tobacco out of his overall pocket and bit off a small chunk.

"Well, I suppose you know," he continued, "that it took a lot of scraping for poor folks like us to get Sary all the meat she wanted after that. I still have to go out every day to bring in fresh meat." He fondled the shotgun for a moment.

"Then, about five years back, Sary happened to be out here at the cabin alone, while Sis and me was in town together. Sary was out in the clearing when a hunter, just like yourself, got hit by a stray bullet. This fellow dragged hisself into the clearing and died right at Sary's feet. Well, the way Sary tries to tell us, she got some blood on her hands somehow, and got a taste of it, and from then on that wasn't no person laying there, it was just fresh meat. By the time Sis and me, we got home, Sary had eat her fill."

Benson's jaw dropped slightly, and his eyes left the old man and returned to the thing that stared at him from the fireplace. The palms of his hands became suddenly cold and moist.

"SIS MADE ME bury the remains, but that night the Voices, they told me to go dig him up and let Sary have the rest, so I

did." He flashed a toothy grin again. "After that Sary just moped around and got sickly, no matter what we fed her. Then the McDaniels girl from across the valley come in to ask directions one day, when I was out tending the corn and Sis was in town. I seen the girl go in the cabin, where Sary was, but she never come out. Sary picked up spirits for a long time after that, and it was then that the Voices told me that I had to help her get meat, the kind of meat she likes. The Voices said that the Lord willed it, and I don't never go against the Lord's will. You read the Bible, mister?"

"I — yes, I do, on occasion." Benson heard his voice as if coming from the other side of the cabin, or maybe from the other side of the world. The old man's breath was in his nostrils, and the vision of his ungainly daughter filled the corner of Benson's eye.

"Follow the Bible and follow the Lord," said the old man with conviction, "and you can't go wrong. Sary and me, we got the Voices to let us know the Lord's will, so it's easier for us than for most folks." He spat on the rough floor. "So I bring Sary the meat she needs to be healthy, as often as I can. If she gets it two-three times a year she don't ail too much, but otherwise she gets right down with the miseries."

"My God," Benson murmured, as the impact of the old man's words finally struck him with full force. His eyes went wide, and suddenly, jumping to his feet, he started hobbling toward the cabin door. The old man brought him down with one swipe of the butt of the shotgun, and Benson hit the floor with a thud.

As Benson lay sprawled on the floor, stunned slightly and bleeding at the temple, Sarah came and stood over him. She had dragged an iron bar with her, and as Benson looked dazedly up, he recognized it as the bar that had spanned the width of the fireplace, above the fire. It was a spit.

"That's right, Sary," said the old man. "Tie him to it."

She clumsily turned Benson over onto his stomach, then tied him, hands, feet and midsection, to the bar.

"Now drag him over to the fire," said the old man.

"Don't do it," Benson said thickly. "For God's sake, don't do it!"

"The Lord's will be done," said the old man.

The thing named Sarah pulled and tugged at Benson and the bar, and in a much too brief moment they were there, the rising flames licking at his back.

"Cut off some of his clothes," said the old man, through the masticating of tobacco. "That

cloth will stink something awful."

Benson tensed every muscle against the horror of the moment. It was obvious they were not even going to use the shotgun first.

Then, just as Sarah was tearing at his shirt, there was a noise across the room, and the heavy door of the cabin swung open wide. Sarah and the old man turned quickly toward it, and Benson looked too, gasping from the heat. There in the open doorway stood a tall, gaunt woman. She was gray-haired, thin-faced, and obviously the old man's sister. She had sized up the situation in one glance.

"Stop!" she commanded.

BENSON WAS dropped like a hot potato, and the female thing slunk a few paces away from him. The fire was still hot on his back.

"Now don't take on, Sis," said the old man defensively. "The Lord has showed His goodness."

"Untie that fellow," she said flatly. She took off a frayed coat and laid it on a rickety bed in a dark corner, together with a brown parcel.

The old man just stood there grumbling belligerently, but the daughter responded quickly to her mother's command. As soon as he was untied, Benson dragged himself to his feet and

stumbled away from the fire.

"My apologies," said the woman. She was unsmiling, but that didn't bother Benson. He wasn't on the spit, and that was all that counted just then. Apparently the old man had refrained from discussing his sister with Benson because she was the one sane member of the family, and did not concur in her brethren's moral code.

"Thanks," he said, breathing hard.

"I don't know how many times I've told them," she said. "I try to bring a daughter up proper, and learn her right ways and clean habits, and Ed just seems to fight me all the way. Sometimes him and her act like they ain't got no breeding at all."

"Aw, I don't mean no wrong," the old man grumbled, going to the table and retrieving the shotgun. "Besides, the Voices told me."

"Voices. That's all I hear from you, is voices," she answered. She walked over to Benson, and looked him over.

"I'm glad you came when you did," he said, still shaken. "They were going to . . ."

"I know what they was up to," she said. "It don't matter how much I preach, they still try this once in a while."

Benson looked at the other two, and shuddered visibly. It had been a rough experience, but it had worked out all right.

He tried not to think about the last few minutes.

"Now, you two are in for a little more preaching, and it might as well be right now. We're going to show this stranger that we're civilized like other folks. Come on, everybody, outside."

She was probably still upset, and Benson could only guess at what she had in mind, but when she waved him toward the door with the other two, he went gladly. Once outside, he would thank her again, and take his leave.

IT WAS DUSK outside, and Benson could just barely make out the tree line on the sky at the edge of the clearing. Sarah was now making unnerving gurgling noises at the woman who was her mother, and shuffling about in deceptively quick movements. She apparently was quite excited about something, probably about the woman's letting him go.

"That's right, Sarah," said the woman. "But just be quiet a minute."

Benson started to speak to her, to thank her and say his farewells and get out, but she continued.

"Mister, you stand right there by the cabin while I remind my kin of the rules they got to live by." She turned from him before he could answer. "Now, Ed, you know better than to

do like this, and Sarah don't, so I'm talking mainly to you. You listening?"

The old man grumbled, looking at the ground.

"Now, you give a rabbit or a deer a chance to run when you hunt, and you don't cook them before you kill them, neither," she began.

Benson swallowed hard.

"Well, you got to do the same here. If I've told you once, I've told you a hundred times, but you just won't listen. Now, what you got to do is let this fellow go, and give him a good five minute start in the woods, and then you go after him. If you get him fair, then you kill him clean, like you would any game. None of that like I saw in the cabin just now."

Benson looked hard at the woman in the fading light. Righteousness shone in every line of her face. "What are you saying?" he said quietly, his stomach knotting.

"You heard me," she said, and her face was hard. "You get a five minute start, and then they come after you."

It was dark now, and Benson's face was pale in a soft moonlight as he stared at the woman. He looked from her to the old man, then to their only child, and back to her. His heart was pounding again in his chest. And as he stood there, silently trying to comprehend the enormity of this three-sided

web of horror, Sarah hopped over to him, her distorted silhouette outlined grotesquely by the moon. Looking up at him with an expression that chilled him through, she put her wet, soft nose on his left arm, which was now bare. He recoiled.

"She's getting the scent, mister," said the old man. "Once she gets the smell, she can track like a bloodhound. Go all night when she's hot on a trail."

Benson's palms were clammy once more.

"All right, mister," said the woman, peering at an old time-piece in the light from the cabin door. "Your time starts now. You better run."

Benson stood for only a moment looking at the three of them in disbelief. In the woods behind him, the crickets had started their nightly concert, and the moon stood bold overhead.

Then he turned and ran. He ran as he had never, never run before.

The Reckoning

There was never any doubt about which story in our second issue was first in your affections; it was *Jules de Grandin* all the way, and he did not receive a single expression of dislike, while the percentage of "outstanding" ratings is impressive — about 25%. Thereafter, the contention was interesting, since there was a good deal of jockeying around. The final returns go like this:

(1) *The House of Horror*, by Seabury Quinn; (2) *Doctor Satan*, by Paul Ernst; (3) *The Secret of the City*, by Terry Carr & Ted White; (4) *The Scourge of B'Moth*, by Bertram Russell; (5) *The Men in Black*, by John Brunner; (6) *The Witch is Dead*, by Edward D. Hoch; (7) *The Strange Case of Pascal*, by Roger Eugene Ulmer.

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Esmerelda

by Rama Wells

THE CIRCUMSTANCES under which the letter arrived were very peculiar. Peculiar indeed. For one thing it arrived at an hour when postal deliveries are somewhat out of order. It was exactly 1:13 A.M. when the thin missile fell through the slot in my front door. To add to my confounding, there was no postmark and no stamp. Although the paper was fresh and crisp, as if the letter had just been written and hand-carried from no farther away than next door, it gave me a feeling that it had come a very long way, indeed. Perhaps it was the unusual quality of the paper that gave me that impression: very thin,

very tough, a velvety feel to the touch. These qualities not usually found in papers produced by American manufacturers.

The letter arrived exactly one hour after I had returned home from a party with some friends of mine. Now, most people would normally set about going directly to bed, having arrived home so late. But I had been unusually exhilarated by the affair and I wanted to reflect a while on the experience before retiring. At least, that is what I told myself in a manner of rationalization . . .

Back in our last years in college the friendship of the five of us had become quite ce-

The letter from Twisdole revealed the grisly secret behind a number of unsolved mysteries.

mented despite our individual idiosyncrasies, and on graduation day we mutually formed a solemn pact that each year we would if we could meet once again for old time's sake. We called ourselves the Spider-Stein Club, since we were each interested in that fascinating branch of the bug-world called spiders, and also because we all liked beer well enough to buy it by the stein.

For several years we kept remarkably well to our pact, when Twisdale, who was something of an oddity even among the likes of us, took leave. Old Twiz, as we used to laughingly refer to him (both behind his back and to his face), had gotten a job with a research outfit, and had been sent to Africa to study — of all things — spiders. How we used to envy him!

Soon after arriving home from the celebration, I began to feel strange. Or perhaps I had begun to feel that way earlier and only noticed it when I got home. It would be hard to describe just how I felt; it was all over me, but concentrated in my head. I began to suspect I was under some malign influence. Or perhaps my planets were in a state of disorder, which is a way of saying the same thing. Perhaps it was the beer taking its toll.

At 1:00 A.M., I decided that I ought to go to bed, but when

I tried to get out of the chair, I seemed to be stuck fast! My heart pounded so that I could hear and feel the pounding pulse in my ears. Had my legs somehow become paralyzed? My body simply refused to obey my commands.

"Now, wait a minute," I said to myself half-aloud, "this can't be right."

Yet the harder I tried to make my body move, the more obstinate it seemed to become. If such a thing is possible, I broke out into a hot sweat and a cold sweat at the same time. I thought at once that I had better call a doctor, but I found to my great dismay that I could not even hold the telephone receiver in my hand. And the dial wouldn't turn!

AT PRECISELY 1:13 A.M., as I was held prisoner in my own chair, I was looking at the front door and trying to think of a solution to my difficulties. I don't know why I happened to look at the door at that precise moment, but there was a white envelope lying on the floor just beneath the letter slot. How it got there I couldn't say, for I had heard no one on the front porch, and I had not heard the letter slot close, which would be the case if someone had brought me a letter.

I wondered if my paralyzed legs would get me out of the chair far enough to get the let-

ter. Indeed I was quite surprised when, at the mere thought of getting the letter, I bounded out of the chair almost as if I had been pushed.

The only writing on the envelope was my name, in a very thin, almost spider - webbery style of writing. My fingers trembled as I turned it over to the other side. It was sealed in red wax in the form of a small hourglass. Immediately I thought of Twisdale, remembering that his specialty among spiders was the poisonous black widow — and, of course, as we all know, the Black Widow has an hourglass on its underside.

Sure enough, the letter was from Twisdale. The handwriting of the letter was easily recognizable as his, despite its unusual thinness. I thought that Twisdale must have been quite elated when he finally found a pen that would write in such a spidery style.

There was also something in the envelope that looked like a newspaper clipping, but it was entirely meaningless to me, it being written in Swahili, or some other native dialect. But in looking at it, I felt a subconscious warning that there was hidden among those strange characters and words a message of vital importance for me.

As I gazed at the print, I noticed something very strange and remarkable happening. It was as if I had suddenly be-

come clairvoyant, as one would say. My mind seemed to transgress time and space limitations and soar through the whole realm of reality, seeing all, potentially. The scene that eventually came to mind seemed to come to me across a space of thousands and thousands of years, and I saw a place in a jungle where there were a few naked natives gathered about a witch-doctor. The witch-doctor was yelling his head off and he had some bundles of sticks that he threw on the ground, screaming, "Juju, jujul" or whatever is the African equivalent for that.

Odd that I should have felt such a jolt — sitting in my own living room chair — as if I had been thrown to the ground myself. I tried to see more, but the vision faded, and I found that the news clipping had fallen to the floor. Then my heart skipped a beat. Was that tomorrow's date I had seen on it? My world had indeed become a strange place.

I turned my attention to Twisdale's letter.

"I must get this done quickly," it read, "for time is short. Recall the last time we met — at the annual Spider Stein celebration, when I announced my good fortune at finding a job?" (Five years before).

"That was exactly a year after we graduated, and the only one I ever attended. But what

I want to talk about is something that happened even before we thought of having a club — back in college. In the last year, or at least during the summer before the last year started, I made the acquaintance of the lovely Esmerelda. She was one of the loveliest ladies I had ever met. As it happened, 'Relda' (short for the other name) had just eaten her husband, and was out looking for new conquests to make. She was out to conquer new fields, and I came along.

"RE尔DA WAS VERY curious about the world. She wanted to know everything, and she was continually inquiring and investigating. Fortunately, or unfortunately as the case may be, it was on one of her investigations that Relda was led into my trap. Hence, we made each other's acquaintance, and regarded each other suspiciously from a distance. But this suspicion eventually grew into a mutual respect and friendship that was very beautiful — while it lasted. And Relda soon entered into my experiments with a verve and enthusiasm that is found rarely, even among humans.

"Now here is something else you didn't know. Shortly after we started our Freshman year in college, I began to dabble in voodoo, and things of that kind. Once in a while, however, I

suspected that you suspected me. I say 'dabble' because I was by no means an expert — a witch-doctor — which title I have recently had the honor to acquire. In my beginning days, successes were few and far between; things often went haywire, and caused me no end of worry — and sometimes amusement. But they say that practice makes perfect. So I practiced.

"Perhaps the most important thing in this business is the doll. Many say that the doll has to be made of wax, but that isn't true at all. You remember when you fell down the stairs in the dormitory and broke your arm? Well, at that very instant, I was in my experiment space, and I had made a doll of you out of nothing but sticks. But something went wrong. Please believe me, my dear friend, I had no intention of doing you any harm, and it was purely by accident that I did. I broke the *right* arm of the doll, and the most curious part of the whole business was that you broke your *left* one. Isn't that amusing? Now, that would not have happened if I had done everything just exactly right. Actually I had intended to use the doll to bring only good to you, but I was just learning at the time; and, as I said before, practice makes perfect and I was out of practice. I am proud to say now

that I don't get things balled up like that any more. I know my dolls; I also know my incantations.

"But, as I was saying, it wasn't long before I found out that the dolls could be made out of just about anything, depending on the kind of spell to be cast and the flexibility of materials that would be required. Wax is the best, for it is almost universally pliable and moldable; but you can use wood, metal, paper, grass, or anything that can be put into a shape resembling the person you want it to represent, however remotely. It is the intention that counts.

"Occasionally, spells are cast by accident, and this can be right amusing sometimes. Do you remember that time when you and Don were having dinner at the Club Cabana? He was taking a drink of water, as I remember it, then suddenly he started to choke, and for about fifteen minutes, no one could do anything to help him. Remember, you told me about it the next morning? The minute you started talking, I knew what had happened.

"Don's Kewpie was sitting on a shelf at the time you were at dinner, and there happened to be a fishbowl right underneath on the next shelf, and whether it was by accident or design, I couldn't say. In re-

turning a book to the shelf, I must have unbalanced the kewpie, and when I had left the room, it fell into the bowl. That was when Don nearly strangled himself to death. About a quarter-hour later, I returned, pulled the kewpie out of the fishbowl and dried it off. So Don got all right. Just think — he might have choked to death if I hadn't come back when I did. You might even say I saved his life in a rather vicarious fashion. I'm glad there were no fish in the water.

"WELL, BACK TO Esmeralda. Dear soul, she took to this new kind of work — you might almost say, *hungrily*. At first, I didn't know what kind of chores would be best for her, so I kept her in a glass jar, where I had placed a twig with green leaves on it. Of course the leaves soon turned brown and dropped off, but Relda was not the least perturbed about it. While waiting for the leaves to go, she had spun a beautiful web for me to look at, and now it was revealed in all its splendor (after I had removed the dead leaves from the jar). You cannot imagine how enthralled I was. Out of gratitude, I began to search more actively for some way in which Relda could achieve her heart's desire of being used in my experiments.

"Do you remember that time when some of the boys in our dorm started cursing the housemother because of the 'goddam bed-bugs' she had let come in? That was accidental, too, I am almost ashamed to admit. Poor woman, she simply didn't know what to do; *she* couldn't find any bed-bugs. All the sheets and blankets and mattresses were absolutely sterile. I can see her now, poor wretch, wringing her hands in despair and almost crying as she faced those stony-faced boys with their accusing looks each morning.

"On the other hand I could hear the boys cursing in bed at night, and scratching and turning and twisting, and unable to get a bit of sleep because of the 'bed-bugs'. I used to have to bite my mouth together real hard to keep from laughing out loud at them. Of course, they had justification for their complaints, but they were blaming the wrong bug. It was Relda causing all the trouble.

"Are you going to ask me, did I turn her loose in bed with those guys? Oh no! Heaven forbid! Poor little thing, she wouldn't have had a chance. I can just see one of those guys roll over poor sweet little 'Relda' with his big butt and mash her to a pulp.

"Rather, I made little dolls of the boys that didn't like me, which was most of them. (You will remember that not *all* the fellows were bothered with the nightly torment). I made a short, stocky one for Freddy, and a tall, lanky one for Ed. And the same with the others: to each, in proportion to his size and weight I assigned a kewpie of similar, though much smaller, dimensions. Now these were hastily and crudely made, but they would serve the purpose I knew. As a matter of fact, had they been made differently, the results may have been different. As it was, things worked out quite nicely — at least for the experiment.

"What I did, you see, was to place the kewpies in a glass container with a top to it. I laid them neatly in two rows, then I tried to coax Relda out of her newfound security. She didn't want to come out at first. But when I told her what was in store for that evening, she practically leaped from her web to the end of the stick I was holding. A big, juicy, green horsefly held up for her also helped to change her mind. Bless her teensy-weensy heart. Then she stood on her hind legs and showed me her hour-glass which was really glowing with excitement. I got the highest kind of thrill when she did that (which wasn't too often) because not many human

beings get to share such intimacies with spiders. Sometimes I would tickle her on the hour-glass and her six free legs would dance spasmodically. I used a ball-point pen for that purpose, and I thought occasionally I could almost hear her laughing. It was a deep, rich, melodious softness, quite different from what the normal or average person would expect to come out of a spider.

"Well, to make a long story short, I put 'Relda in the glass container with the 'boys'. You should have seen her. I have never seen a spider get as excited as did 'Relda. All eight of her legs were reaching out for the dolls, and when I finally let her go, she walked back and forth in apparent glee over them all night long. No wonder those boys suffered so. I know it was cruelty unexcusable, but I still cannot help laughing about it.

"NOW, WHAT I have been describing was not the limit of 'Relda's talents by any means. I'm sure you remember that girl who almost died of suffocation, from being wrapped so tightly in her bedclothes? That, too, was 'Relda's doing. As a matter of fact, I disclaim any responsibility for that event. In reality, I rather admired the girl even though she would have nothing to do with me (I never could understand

why), and I wouldn't have caused any harm to come to her.

"Of course, one could get me on the technicality that I made the doll of her; and I brought 'Relda into captivity. But these two incidents have no relation whatsoever; this was truly an accident. As it happened, I forgot to replace the cover on 'Relda's jar before I left the room one day, and I left the girl's doll lying on the table next to the jar. You have to believe me: there was no plan in my mind. 'Relda just decided to take matters into her own hands — I mean, legs. All night long she worked at her task, spinning and weaving, and by morning, 'Relda had completely swathed the kewpie doll in her spittle. The web was wrapped closely and tightly around the doll. And that explains the whole thing, doesn't it?

"Except, of course, for one thing: Why? It seems that 'Relda, since coming to participate with me in my experiments, had developed a swell-head and a jealous streak, and she would not tolerate my being friendly with any woman, human or otherwise. You should have seen the fit she threw when I brought the female dog up. And I can tell you, there's nothing like a jealous spider, especially one with a sac of poison inside. I just

missed getting a squirt of it several times.

"This, unfortunately, was the beginning of our estrangement. Relda wanted me to give up all women — except herself, of course. You may have noted how disturbed and out-of-sorts I was during those weeks.

"The disaster that ended everything was like this: I guess you have probably concluded by now that Relda was a very smart Black Widow. Indeed she was, and let me give you this final example. She could tell the difference between a male and a female kewpie doll — provided, of course, that they were in proper attire.

"Only, one time I forgot. There was a girl at school that I was going to give the bedbug treatment. Oh, she was fat, prissy, just too, too everything, and I'm sure you know who I mean. In my haste I set Relda on the doll without first dressing it. Relda became confused and started to go round in circles. She didn't know what to do. Before I knew what was happening, I discovered her crawling up my arm. Now that scared the hell out of me, and I brushed her off quickly, and she fell to the floor, all eight legs wriggling like mad, and the hourglass

turning all colors of the rainbow, but mostly red.

"I knew then, with despondency, that it was all over between Esmerelda and me. There was no chance of a patch-up, or a return to our once harmonious relations. I knew that she would be forever stinging for me. Hell, I couldn't blame her. What woman would give a man another chance after being treated like that?

"There I was, looking at Relda down on the floor in both physical and emotional torment. It was heart-breaking, but there was only one thing to do, as with a lame horse. I lifted up my big gumboot old shoe and squashed the life out of her. A shudder shook my whole body, and I broke into tears, miserable wretch that I was. I had killed my lovely Esmerelda. I had to turn my eyes away when I lifted my shoe from the place, and I couldn't go by that spot for a week or more. You probably remember how moody and sensitive, how touchy I became.

"NOW I THOUGHT that after the shock of my dastardly deed had worn off, and things had gotten more or less back to normal, that would have been the end of it. But it was not to be so, as I learned in so soul-shocking a manner just today, and it is the reason, in

part, that I have written you these pages. Do you think that even spiders have a psychic world of poisonous communication?

You will remember how spic and span I kept myself and my clothes, especially when we were in the field. I had great fear of getting one of those hideous poisonous things on me. Well, here I am now at the edge of a great Lybyan desert, and all of a sudden, I begin to feel things crawling on my skin. I see nothing, and I strip down until I am completely naked, and I still see nothing that could be causing the sensation. At this time, the others in the party are looking at me as if I have suddenly gone crazy. But I had to be sure, you understand.

"Then, suddenly, I see a large-sized Tarantula coming up out of his hole in the desert floor. The oddest thing happens. The creature gazes at me hypnotically with its beady eyes. Here I am naked and exposed to the thing, and I know I ought to run from it, but I don't seem to be able to. It reaches me, crawls up my leg, my back, and goes out onto my right arm. There, it slides its toxic needle deep into my bloodstream at the exact place from which I had knocked Esmerelda years before. Shortly thereafter, the monstrous thing crawled off me and went

back to its hole in the sand, leaving me to die.

"Yes, Dear Friend, I am dying, and will be dead hours before you get this, even though it comes borne on the winds. By that time, my body will be food for the desert carrion. But this eventuality cannot keep me from wondering about what happened. It seemed planned. I wonder if there is a spidereal afterlife. Perhaps I shall soon find out.

"At any rate, Dear Friend, that is where I am headed apparently, and I do not relish the idea of going there alone. I want you with me, you and all my other friends of Spider-Stein, and we shall together once more drink and make merry. I have therefore taken the proper steps. Perhaps you have already noticed a slight headache, a slight dizziness, a slight feeling of nausea, a feeling that the room is too warm. That is a sure sign that you are under my spell. Do not worry, because it won't do you any good. All of the symptoms will get more intense as time passes — until the end. Go upstairs to your bed. We shall meet anon, my friend.

I STARTED to laugh. What a crackpot Twisdale was, trying to frighten me with that stuff. Then I noticed that my headache had grown worse, and there was a slight dizzi-

ness. I broke out into a sweat as I realized that what he had said might really be true. I gazed up the stairs to my room — to my death chamber. Somebody or something seemed to be pushing me up, up, faster and faster. I had a vision of Esmerelda lying in wait for me in the darkness.

Spiders anyone?

(Note: The above papers were found in a drawer of James C.'s desk, shortly after his sudden death. Authorities are trying to trace the other members of the so-called Spider-Stein Club.)

XXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXX

FOLLOW YOUR STARS TO SUCCESS

by June Marsden

Each of us has a definite Mission to fill in life. Miss Marsden, Australia's popular astrologer, shows how Astrology is used to tell us just what our Mission is, what our capabilities and inclinations are. Added to a wealth of exciting and factual information on astrology and the famous people who live by it, the author gives us simple instructions — without any mystery or complications — on casting the horoscope and interpreting it to gain understanding of yourself and others.

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The Trial For Murder

by *Charles Collins &*
Charles Dickens

I HAVE always noticed a prevalent want of courage, even among persons of superior intelligence and culture, as to imparting their own psychological experiences when those have been of a strange sort. Almost all men are afraid that what they could relate in such wise would find no parallel or response in a listener's internal

life, and might be suspected or laughed at. A truthful traveler, who should have seen some extraordinary creature in the likeness of a sea-serpent, would have no fear of mentioning it; but the same traveler, having had some singular presentiment, impulse, vagary of thought, vision (so-called), dream, or other remarkable mental im-

Why was it that every time the jury was counted, the figure seemed to come to thirteen?

pression, would hesitate considerably before he would own to it. To this reticence I attribute much of the obscurity in which such subjects are involved. We do not habitually communicate our experiences of these subjective things as we do our experiences of objective creation. The consequence is that the general stock of experience in this regard appears exceptional, and really is so, in respect of being miserably imperfect.

In what I am going to relate, I have no intention of setting up, opposing, or supporting any theory whatever. I know the history of the Bookseller of Berlin, I have studied the case of the wife of a late Astronomer-Royal as related by Sir David Brewster, and I have followed the minutest details of a much more remarkable case of Spectral Illusion occurring within my private circle of friends. It may be necessary to state as to this last, that the sufferer (a lady) was in no degree, however distant, related to me. A mistaken assumption on that head might suggest an explanation of a part of my own case — but only a part — which would be wholly without foundation. It cannot be referred to my inheritance of any developed peculiarity, nor had I ever before any at all similar experience, nor have I ever had

any at all similar experience since.

It does not signify how many years ago, or how few, a certain murder was committed in England, which attracted great attention. We hear more than enough of murderers as they rise in succession to their atrocious eminence, and I would bury the memory of this particular brute, if I could, as his body was buried in Newgate Jail. I purposely abstain from giving any direct clue to the criminal's individuality.

When the murder was first discovered, no suspicion fell — or I ought to say, for I cannot be too precise in my facts, it was nowhere publicly hinted that any suspicion fell — on the man who was afterwards brought to trial. As no reference was at that time made to him in the newspapers, it is obviously impossible that any description of him can at that time have been given in the newspapers. It is essential that this fact be remembered.

Unfolding at breakfast my morning paper, containing the account of that first discovery, I found it to be deeply interesting, and I read it with close attention. I read it twice, if not three times. The discovery had been made in a bedroom, and when I laid down the paper, I was aware of a flash — rush — flow — I do not know what to call it — no word I can find is

satisfactorily descriptive — in which I seemed to see that bedroom, like a picture impossibly painted on a running river. Though almost instantaneous in its passing, it was perfectly clear; so clear that I distinctly, and with a sense of relief, observed the absence of the dead body from the bed.

It was in no romantic place that I had this curious sensation, but in chambers in Piccadilly, very near to the corner of St. James's Street. It was entirely new to me. I was in my easy-chair at the moment, and the sensation was accompanied with a peculiar shiver which started the chair from its position. (But it is to be noted that the chair ran easily on casters.) I went to one of the windows (there are two in the room, and the room is on the second floor) to refresh my eyes with the moving objects down in Piccadilly. It was a bright autumn morning, and the street was sparkling and cheerful. The wind was high. As I looked out, it brought down from the Park a quantity of fallen leaves, which a gust took and whirled into a spiral pillar. As the pillar fell and the leaves dispersed, I saw two men on the opposite side of the way, going from west to east. They were one behind the other. The foremost man often looked back over his shoulder. The second man followed him,

at a distance of some thirty paces, with his right hand menacingly raised. First, the singularity and steadiness of this threatening gesture in so public a thoroughfare attracted my attention; and next, the more remarkable circumstance that nobody heeded it. Both men threaded their way among the other passengers with a smoothness hardly consistent even with the action of walking on a pavement; and no single creature, that I could see, gave them place, touched them, or looked after them. In passing before my windows, they both stared up at me. I saw their two faces very distinctly, and I knew that I could recognize them anywhere. Not that I had consciously noticed anything very remarkable in either face, except that the one who went first had an unusually lowering appearance, and that the face of the who followed him was of the color of impure wax.

I AM A bachelor, and my valet and his wife constitute my whole establishment. My occupation is in a certain Branch Bank, and I wish that my duties as head of a Department were as light as they are popularly supposed to be. They kept me in town that autumn, when I stood in need of change. I was not ill, but I was not well. My reader is to make the most that can be reasonably

made of my feeling jaded, having a depressing sense upon me of a monotonous life, and being "slightly dyspeptic". I am assured by my renowned doctor that my real state of health at that time justifies no stronger description, and I quote his own from his written answer to my request for it.

As the circumstances of the murder, gradually unravelling, took stronger and stronger possession of the public mind, I kept them away from mine by knowing as little about them as was possible in the midst of the universal excitement. But I knew that a verdict of Wilful Murder had been found against the suspected murderer, and that he had been committed to Newgate for trial. I also knew that his trial had been postponed over one Sessions of the Central Criminal Court, on the ground of general prejudice and want of time for the preparation of the defence. I may further have known, but I believe I did not, when, or about when, the Sessions to which his trial stood postponed would come on.

My sitting-room, bedroom, and dressing-room are all on one floor. With the last there is no communication but through the bedroom. True, there is a door in it, once communicating with the staircase; but a part of the fitting of my bath has been — and had then

been for some years — fixed across it. At the same period, and as a part of the same arrangement, the door had been nailed up and canvassed over.

I was standing in my bedroom late one night, giving some directions to my servant before he went to bed. My face was towards the only available door of communication with the dressing-room, and it was closed. My servant's back was towards that door. While I was speaking to him, I saw it open, and a man look in who very earnestly and mysteriously beckoned to me. That man was the man who had gone second of the two along Piccadilly, and whose face was of the color of impure wax.

The figure, having beckoned, drew back and closed the door. With no longer pause than was made by my crossing the bedroom I opened the dressing-room door, and looked in. I had a lighted candle already in my hand. I felt no inward expectation of seeing the figure in the dressing-room, and I did not see it there.

Conscious that my servant stood amazed, I turned round to him, and said: "Derrick, could you believe that in my cool senses I fancied I saw a —" As I there laid my hand upon his breast, with a sudden start he trembled violently, and said, "O Lord, yes sir! A dead man beckoning!"

Now I do not believe that this John Derrick, my trusty and attached servant for more than twenty years, had any impression whatever of having seen any such figure, until I touched him. The change in him was so startling, when I touched him, that I fully believe he derived his impression in some occult manner from me at that instant.

I bade John Derrick bring some brandy, and I gave him a dram, and was glad to take one myself. Of what had preceded that night's phenomenon, I told him not a single word. Reflecting on it, I was absolutely certain that I had never seen that face before, except on the one occasion in Piccadilly. Comparing its expression when beckoning at the door with its expression when it had stared up at me as I stood at my window, I came to the conclusion that on the first occasion it had soothed to fasten itself upon my memory, and that on the second occasion it had made use of being immediately remembered.

I was not very comfortable that night, though I felt a certainty, difficult to explain, that the figure would not return. At daylight I fell into a heavy sleep, from which I was awakened by John Derrick's coming to my bedside with a paper in his hand.

This paper, it appeared had been the subject of an alterca-

tion at the door between its bearer and my servant. It was a summons to me to serve upon a Jury at the forthcoming Sessions of the Central Criminal Court at the Old Bailey. I had never before been summoned on such a Jury, as John Derrick well knew. He believed — I am not certain at this hour whether with reason or otherwise — that that class of Jurors were customarily chosen on a lower qualification than mine, and he had at first refused to accept the summons. The man who served it had taken the matter very coolly. He had said that my attendance or non-attendance was nothing to him: there the summons was; and I should deal with it at my own peril, and not at his.

FOR A DAY or two I was undecided whether to respond to this call, or take no notice of it. I was not conscious of the slightest mysterious bias, influence, or attraction, one way or the other. Of that I am strictly sure as of every other statement that I make here. Ultimately I decided, as a break in the monotony of my life, that I would go.

The appointed morning was a raw morning in the month of November. There was a dense brown fog in Piccadilly, and it became positively black and in of the last degree oppressive east of Temple Bar. I found the

passages and staircases of the Courthouse flaringly lighted with gas, and the Court itself similarly illuminated. I think that, until I was conducted by officers into the Old Court and saw its crowded state, I did not know that the Murderer was to be tried that day. I *think* that, until I was so helped into the Old Court with considerable difficulty, I did not know into which of the two Courts sitting my summons would take me. But this must not be received as a positive assertion, for I am not completely satisfied in my mind on either point.

I took my seat in the place appropriated to Jurors in waiting, and I looked about the Court as well I could through the cloud of fog and breath that was heavy in it. I noticed the black vapor hanging like a murky curtain outside the great windows, and I noticed the stifled sound of wheels on the straw or tan that was littered in the street; also, the hum of the people gathered there, which a shrill whistle, or a louder song or hail than the rest, occasionally pierced. Soon afterwards the Judges, two in number, entered, and took their seats. The buzz in the Court was awfully hushed. The direction was given to put the Murderer to the bar. He appeared there. And in that same instant I recognized in him the first of the two men who had gone down Piccadilly.

If my name had been called then, I doubt if I could have answered to it audibly. But it was called about sixth or eighth in the panel, and I was by the time able to say "Here!" Now observe. As I stepped into the box, the prisoner, who had been looking on attentively, but with no sign of concern, became violently agitated, and beckoned to his attorney. The prisoner's wish to challenge me was so manifest, that it occasioned a pause, during which the attorney with his hand upon the dock, whispered with his client, and shook his head. I afterwards had it from the gentleman that the prisoner's first affrighted words to him were, "*At all hazards, challenge that man!*" But that, as he would give no reason for it, and admitted that he had not even known my name until he heard it called and I appeared, it was not done.

Both on the ground already explained, that I wish to avoid reviving the unwholesome memory of that Murderer, and also because a detailed account of his long trial is by no means indispensable to my narrative, I shall confine myself closely to such incidents in the ten days and nights during which we, the Jury, were kept together, as directly bear on my own curious personal experience. It is in that, and not in the Murderer, that I seek to interest my reader. It is to that, and not to a page of

the Newgate Calendar, that I beg attention.

I WAS CHOSEN Foreman of the Jury. On the second morning of the trial, after evidence had been taken for two hours (I heard the church clocks strike), happening to cast my eyes over my brother jurymen, I found an inexplicable difficulty in counting them. I counted them several times, yet always with the same difficulty. In short, I made them one too many.

I touched the brother jurymen whose place was next to me, and I whispered to him, "Oblige me by counting us." He looked surprised by the request, but turned his head and counted. "Why," said he suddenly, "we are thirt—but no, it's not possible. No. We are twelve."

According to my counting that day, we were always right in detail, but in the gross we were always one too many. There was no appearance — no figure — to account for it; but I had now an inward foreshadowing of the figure that was surely coming.

The Jury were housed at the London Tavern. We all slept in one large room on separate tables, and we were constantly in the charge and under the eye of the officer sworn to hold us in safe keeping. I see no reason for suppressing the real name of that officer. He was

intelligent, highly polite, and obliging, and (I was glad to hear) much respected in the City. He had an agreeable presence, good eyes, enviable black whiskers, and a fine sonorous voice. His name was Mr. Harker.

When we turned into our twelve beds at night, Mr. Harker's bed was drawn across the door. On the night of the second day, not being disposed to lie down, and seeing Mr. Harker sitting on his bed, I went and sat beside him, and offered him a pinch of snuff. As Mr. Harker's hand touched mine in taking it from my box, a peculiar shiver crossed him, and he said, "Who is this?"

FOLLOWING Mr. Harker's eyes, and looking along the room, I saw again the figure I expected — the second of the two men who had gone down Piccadilly. I rose, and advanced a few steps; stopped, and looked round at Mr. Harker. He was quite unconcerned, laughed, and said in a pleasant way: "I thought for a moment we had a thirteenth jurymen, without a bed. I see it is the moonlight."

Making no revelation to Mr. Harker, but inviting him to take a walk with me to the end of the room, I watched what the figure did. It stood for a few moments by the bedside of each of my eleven brother jurymen, close to the pillow. It always

went to the right-hand side of the bed, and always passed out crossing the foot of the next bed. It seemed, from the action of the head, merely to look down pensively at each recumbent figure. It took no notice of me, or of my bed, which was that nearest to Mr. Harker's. It seemed to go out where the moonlight came in, through a high window, as by an aerial flight of stairs.

Next morning at breakfast, it appeared that everybody present had dreamed of the murdered man last night, except myself and Mr. Harker.

I now felt as convinced that the second man who had gone down Piccadilly was the murdered man (so to speak), as if it had been borne into my comprehension by his immediate testimony. But even this took place, and in a manner for which I was not at all prepared.

On the fifth day of the trial, when the ease for the prosecution was drawing to a close, a miniature of the murdered man, missing from his bedroom upon the discovery of the deed, and afterwards found in a hiding-place where the Murderer had been seen digging, was put in evidence. Having been identified by the witness under examination, it was handed up to the Bench, and thence handed down to be inspected by the Jury. As an officer in a black gown was making his way with

it across to me, the figure of the second man who had gone down Piccadilly impetuously started from the crowd, caught the miniature from the officer, and gave it to me with his own hands, at the same time saying, in a low and hollow tone — before I saw the miniature, which was in a locket — "*I was younger then, and my face was not then drained of blood.*" It also came between me and the brother juryman to whom I would have given the miniature, and the brother juryman to whom he would have given it, and so passed it on through the whole of our number, and back into my possession. Not one of them, however, detected this.

At table, and generally when we were shut up together in Mr. Harker's custody, we had from the first naturally discussed the day's proceedings a good deal. On that fifth day, the case for the prosecution being closed, and we having that side of the question in a completed shape before us, our discussion was more animated and serious. Among our number was a vestryman — the densest idiot I have ever seen at large — who met the plainest evidence with the most preposterous objections, and who was sided with by two flabby parochial parasites; all the three impanelled from a district so delivered over to Fever that they ought to have been upon their own trial

for five hundred Murders. When these mischievous blockheads were at their loudest, which was towards midnight, while some of us were already preparing for bed, I again saw the murdered man. He stood grimly behind them, beckoning to me. On my going towards them, and striking into the conversation, he immediately retired. This was the beginning of a separate series of appearances, confined to that long room in which We were confined. Whenever a knot of my brother jurymen laid their heads together, I saw the head of the murdered man among theirs. Whenever their comparison of notes was going against him, he would solemnly and irresistibly beckon to me.

IT WILL BE borne in mind that down to the production of the miniature, on the fifth day of the trial, I had never seen the Appearance in Court. Three changes occurred now that we entered on the case for the defence. Two of them I will mention together, first. The figure was now in Court continually, and it never there addressed itself to me, but always to the person who was speaking at the time. For instance: the throat of the murdered man had been cut straight across. In the opening speech for the defence, it was suggested that the deceased might have cut

his own throat. At that very moment, the figure, with its throat in the dreadful condition referred to (this it had concealed before), stood at the speaker's elbow, motioning across and across its windpipe, now with the right hand, now with the left, vigorously suggesting to the speaker himself the impossibility of such a wound having been self-inflicted by either hand. For another instance: a witness to character, a woman, deposed to the prisoner's being the most amiable of mankind. The figure at that instant stood on the floor before her, looking her full in the face, and pointing out the prisoner's evil countenance with an extended arm and an outstretched finger.

The third change now to be added impressed me strongly as the most marked and striking of all. I do not theorize upon it; I accurately state it, and there leave it. Although the Appearance was not itself perceived by those whom it addressed, its coming close to such persons was invariably attended by some trepidation or disturbance on their part. It seemed to me as if it were prevented by laws to which I was not amenable, from fully revealing itself to others, and yet as if it could invisibly, dumbly, and darkly overshadow their minds. When the leading counsel for the defence suggested that hypothesis of sui-

cide, and the figure stood at the learned gentleman's elbow, frightfully sawing at its severed throat, it is undeniable that the counsel faltered in his speech, lost for a few seconds the thread of his ingenious discourse, wiped his forehead with his handkerchief, and turned extremely pale. When the witness to character was confronted by the Appearance, her eyes most certainly did follow the direction of its pointed finger, and rest in great hesitation and trouble over the prisoner's face.

Two additional illustrations will suffice. On the eighth day of the trial, after the pause which was every day made early in the afternoon for a few minutes rest and refreshment, I came back into Court with the rest of the Jury some little time before the return of the Judges. Standing up in the box and looking about me, I thought the figure was not there, until, chancing to raise my eyes to the gallery, I saw it bending forward, and leaning over a very decent woman, as if to assure itself whether the Judges had resumed their seats or not. Immediately afterwards the woman screamed, fainted, and was carried out. So with the venerable, sagacious, and patient Judge who conducted the trial. When the case was over, and he settled himself and his papers to sum up, the murdered man, entering by the Judge's door, advanced

to his Lordship's desk, and looked eagerly over his shoulder at the pages of his votes which he was turning. A change came over his Lordship's face; his hand stopped; the peculiar shiver, that I knew so well, passed over him; he faltered, "Excuse me, gentlemen, for a few moments I am somewhat oppressed by the vitiated air"; and did not recover until he had drunk a glass of water.

THROUGH ALL the monotony of six of those interminable ten days — the same Judges and others on the bench, the same Murderer in the dock, the same lawyers at the table, the same tones of question and answer rising to the roof of the Court, the same scratching of the Judge's pen, the same ushers going in and out, the same lights kindled at the same hour when there had been any natural light of day, the same foggy curtain outside the great windows when it was foggy, the same rain pattering and dripping when it was rainy, the same footmarks of turnkeys and prisoner day after day on the same sawdust, the same keys locking and unlocking the same heavy doors — through all the wearisome monotony which made me feel as if I had been Foreman of the Jury for a vast period of time, and Piccadilly had flourished coevally with Babylon, the murdered man nev-

er lost one trace of his distinctness in my eyes, nor was he at any moment less distinct than anybody else. I must not omit, as a matter of fact, that I never once saw the Appearance which I call by the name of the murdered man look at the Murderer. Again and again I wondered, "Why does he not?" But he never did.

Nor did he look at me, after the production of the miniature, until the last closing minutes of the trial arrived. We retired to consider, at seven minutes before ten at night. The idiotic vestryman and his two parochial parasites gave us so much trouble that we twice returned into Court to beg to have certain extracts from the Judge's notes reread. Nine of us had not the slightest doubt about those passages, neither, I believe, had any one in the Court; the dunderheaded triumvirate, however, having no idea but obstruction, disputed them for that very reason. At length we prevailed, and finally the Jury returned into Court at ten minutes past twelve.

The murdered man at that time stood directly opposite the Jury box, on the other side of

the Court. As I took my place, his eyes rested on me with great attention; he seemed satisfied, and slowly shook a great gray veil, which he carried on his arm for the first time, over his head and whole form. As I gave in our verdict, "Guilty", the veil collapsed, all was gone, and his place was empty.

The Murderer, being asked by the Judge, according to usage, whether he had anything to say before sentence of Death should be passed upon him, indistinctly muttered something which was described in the leading newspapers of the following day as "a few rambling, incoherent, and half-audible words, in which he was understood to complain that he had not had a fair trial, because the Foreman of the Jury was prepossessed against him." The remarkable declaration that he really made was this: *"My Lord, I knew I was a doomed man when the Foreman of my Jury came into the box. My Lord, I knew he would never let me off, because, before I was taken, he somehow got to my bedside in the night, woke me, and put a rope round my neck."*

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The Blood-Flower

by Seabury Quinn

"ALLO," Jules de Grandin seized the receiver from the office telephone before the echo of the tinkling bell had ceased, "who is it, please? But of course, *Mademoiselle*, you may speak with Dr. Trowbridge." He passed the instrument to me and busied himself with a third unsuccessful attempt to ignite the evil-smelling French cigarette with which he insisted on fumigating the room.

"Yes?" I queried, placing the receiver to my ear.

"This is Miss Ostrander, Dr. Trowbridge," a well modulated voice informed me. "Mrs. Evander's nurse, you know."

"Yes?" I repeated, a little sharply, annoyed at being called by an ordinary case after an onerous day. "What is it?"

"I — I don't quite know, sir." She laughed the short, semi-hysterical laugh of an em-

Outside the window came the spine-chilling howls; and inside, the woman on the bed answered them.

barrassed woman. "She's acting very queerly. She — she's — oh, my, there it goes again, sir! Please come over right away; I'm afraid she's becoming delirious!" And with that she hung up, leaving me in a state of astounded impatience.

"Confound the woman!" I scolded as I prepared to slip into my overcoat. "Why couldn't she have hung on thirty seconds more and told me what the matter was?"

"Eh, what is it, my friend?" De Grandin gave up his attempt to make the cigarette burn and regarded me with one of his fixed, unwinking stares. "You are puzzled, you are in trouble; can I assist you?"

"Perhaps," I replied. "There's a patient of mine, a Mrs. Evander, who's been suffering from a threatened leukemia — I've administered Fowler's solution and arsenic trioxid and given her bed-rest treatment for the past week. It looked as if we had the situation pretty well in hand, but . . ." I repeated Miss Ostrander's message.

"Ah?" he murmured, musingly. "'There it goes again,' she did say? What, I wonder, was 'it'; a cough, a convulsion, or — who can say? Let us hasten, my friend. *Parbleu*, she does intrigue me, that *Mademoiselle Ostrander* with her so cryptic 'There it goes again!'"

LIGHTS were gleaming through the storm from the windows of the Evander house as we came to a stop before its wide veranda. A colored servant, half clothed and badly frightened, let us in and ushered us on tiptoe to the upper story chamber where the mistress of the establishment lay sick.

"What's wrong?" I demanded as I entered the sickroom, de Grandin at my heels.

A glance at the patient reassured me. She lay back on a little pile of infant pillows, her pretty blonde hair trickling in stray rivulets of gold from the confines of her lace sleeping cap, her hand, almost as white as the linen itself, spread restfully on the Madeira counterpane.

"Humph!" I exclaimed, turning angrily to Miss Ostrander. "Is this what you called me out in the rain to see?"

The nurse raised a forefinger quickly to her lips and motioned toward the hall with her eyes. "Doctor," she said in a whisper when we stood outside the sickroom door, "I know you'll think me silly, but — but it was positively ghastly!"

"*Tiens, Mademoiselle*," de Grandin cut in, "I pray you be more explicit: first you tell Friend Trowbridge that something — we not what — goes again, now you do inform us that something is ghastly.

Pardieu, you have my sheep — non, non, how do you say? — my goat!"

In spite of herself the girl laughed at the tragic face he turned to her, but she recovered her gravity quickly.

"Last night," she went on, still in a whisper, "and the night before, just at 12, a dog howled somewhere in the neighborhood. I couldn't place the sound, but it was one of those long, quavering howls, almost human. Positively, you might have mistaken it for the cry of a little child in pain, at first."

De Grandin tweaked first one, then the other end of his trimly waxed blond mustache. "And it was the sleepless dog's lament which went again, and which was so ghastly, *Mado-moiselle?*" he inquired solicitously.

"No!" the nurse exploded with suppressed vehemence and heightened color. "It was Mrs. Evander, sir. Night before last, when the beast began baying, she stirred in her sleep — turned restlessly for a moment, then went back to sleep. When it howled the second time, a little nearer the house, she half sat up, and made a queer little growling noise in her throat. Then she slept. Last night the animal was howling louder and longer, and Mrs. Evander seemed more restless and made odd

noises more distinctly. I thought the dog was annoying her, or that she might be having a nightmare, so I got her a drink of water; but when I tried to give it to her, *she snarled at me!*"

"*Eh bien*, but this is of interest," de Grandin commented. "She did snarl at you, you say?"

"Yes, sir. She didn't wake up when I touched her on the shoulder; just turned her head toward me and showed her teeth and growled. Growled like a bad-tempered dog."

"Yes? And then?"

"Tonight the dog began howling a few minutes earlier, five or ten minutes before midnight, perhaps, and it seemed to me his voice was much stronger. Mrs. Evander had the same reaction she had the other two nights at first, but suddenly she sat bolt-upright in bed, rolled her head from side to side, and drew back her lips and growled, then she began snapping at the air, like a dog annoyed by a fly. I did my best to quiet her, but I didn't like to go too near — I was afraid, really — and all at once the dog began howling again, right in the next yard, it seemed, and Mrs. Evander threw back her bedclothes, knelt up in bed and *answered him!*"

"ANSWERED him?" I echoed in stupefaction.

"Yes, doctor, she threw back her head and howled — long, quavering howls, just like his. At first they were low, but they grew louder and higher till the servants heard them, and James, the butler, came to the door to see what the matter was. Poor fellow, he was nearly scared out of his wits when he saw her."

"And then . . .?" I began.

"Then I called you. Right while I was talking to you, the dog began baying again, and Mrs. Evander answered him. That was what I meant" — she turned to de Grandin — "when I said 'There it goes again,' I had to hang up before I could explain to you, Dr. Trowbridge, for she had started to crawl out of bed toward the window, and I had to run and stop her."

"But why didn't you tell me this yesterday, or this afternoon when I was here?" I demanded.

"I didn't like to, sir. It all seemed so crazy, so utterly impossible, especially in the daytime, that I was afraid you'd think I'd been asleep on duty and dreamed it all; but now that James has seen it, too . . ."

Outside in the rain-drenched night there suddenly rose a wail, long-drawn, pulsating doleful as the cry of an abandoned soul. "*O-o-o — o-o-o-o — o-o-o — o-o-o-o!*" it rose

and fell, quavered and almost died away, then resurged with increased force. "*O-o-o — o-o-o-o — o-o-o-o — o-o-o-o!*"

"Hear it?" the nurse cried, her voice thin-edged with excitement and fear.

Again, "*O-o-o — o-o-o-o — o-o-o — o-o-o-o!*" like the echo of the howls outside came an answering cry from the sickroom beyond the door.

Miss Ostrander dashed into the room, de Grandin and I close behind her.

The dainty white counterpane had been thrown back, Mrs. Evander, clad only in her Georgette nightrobe and bed-cap, had crossed the floor to the window and flung up the sash. Already the wind-whipped rain was beating in upon her as she leaned across the sill, one pink sole toward us, one little white foot on the window-ledge, preparatory to jumping.

"*Mon Dieu, seize her!*" de Grandin shrieked, and, matching command with performance leaped across the room, grasped her shoulders in his small, strong hands, and bore her backward as she flexed the muscles of her legs to hurl herself into the yard below.

For a moment she fought like a tigress, snarling, scratching, even snapping at us with her teeth, but Miss Ostrander and I overbore her and thrust her into bed, drawing the

covers over her and holding them down like a strait-jacket against her furious struggles.

De Grandin leaned across the window-sill, peering out into the stormy darkness. "A-roint thee, accursed of God!" I heard him shout into the wind as he drew the sash down, snapped the catch fast and turned again to the room.

"Ah?" he approached the struggling patient and bent over her, staring intently. "A grain and a half of morphine in her arm, if you please, Friend Trowbridge. The dose is heavy for a non-addict, but" — he shrugged his shoulders — "it is *necessaire* that she sleep, this poor one. So! That is better.

"*Mademoiselle*," he regarded Miss Ostrander with his wide-eyed stare, "I do not think she will be thus disturbed in the day, but I most strongly urge that hereafter you administer a dose of one-half grain of codein dissolved in eighty parts of water each night not later than half-past 10. Dr. Trowbridge will write the prescription.

"Friend Trowbridge," he interrupted himself, "where, if at all, is *Madame's* husband, Monsieur Evander?"

"He's gone to Atlanta on a business trip," Miss Ostrander supplied. "We expect him back tomorrow."

"Tomorrow? *Zut*, that is too bad!" de Grandin exclaimed.

"*Eh bien*, with you Americans it is always the business. Business before happiness; *cordieu*, business before the safety of those you love!

"*Mademoiselle*, you will please keep in touch with Dr. Trowbridge and me at all times, and when that Monsieur Evander does return from his business trip, please tell him that we desire to see him soon — at once, right away, immediately.

"Come, Friend Trowbridge — *bonne nuit, Mademoiselle.*"

"I SAY, Dr. Trowbridge," Niles Evander flung angrily into my consulting room, "what's the idea of keeping my wife doped like this? Here I just got back from a trip to the South last night and rushed out to the house to see her before she went to sleep, and that dam' nurse said she'd given her a sleepin' powder and couldn't waken her. I don't like it, I tell you, and I won't have it! I told the nurse that if she gave her any dope tonight she was through, and that goes for you, too!" He glared defiantly at me.

De Grandin, sunk in the depths of a great chair with a copy of de Gobineau's melancholy *Lovers of Kandahar*, glanced up sharply, then consulted the watch strapped to his wrist. "It is a quarter of 11," he announced apropos of nothing, laying down the elegant

blue-and-gold volume and rising from his seat.

Evander turned on him, eyes ablaze. "You're Dr. de Grandin," he accused. "I've heard of you from the nurse. It was you who persuaded Trowbridge to dope my wife — buttin' in on a case that didn't concern you. I know all about you," he went on furiously as the Frenchman gave him a cold stare. "You're some sort of charlatan from Paris, a dabbler in criminology and spiritualism and that sort of rot. Well, sir, I want to warn you to keep your hands off my wife. American doctors and American methods are good enough for me!"

"Your patriotism is most admirable, *Monsieur*," de Grandin murmured with a suspicious mildness. "If you . . ."

The jangle of the telephone bell cut through his words. "Yes?" he asked sharply, raising the receiver, but keeping his cold eyes fixed on Evander's face. "Yes, Mademoiselle Ostrander, this is — *grand Dieu!* What? how long? Eh, do you say so? *Dix million diables!* But of course, we come, we hasten — *morbleu*, but we shall fly.

"Gentlemen," he hung up the receiver, then turned to us, inclining his shoulders ceremoniously to each of us in turn, his gaze as expressionless as the eyes of a graven image,

"that was Mademoiselle Ostrander on the 'phone. Madame Evander is gone — disappeared."

"Gone? Disappeared?" Evander echoed stupidly, looking helplessly from de Grandin to me and back again. He slumped down in the nearest chair, gazing straight before him unseeing. "Great God!" he murmured.

"Precisely, *Monsieur*," de Grandin agreed in an even, emotionless voice. "That is exactly what I said. Meantime" — he gave me a significant glance — "let us go, *cher* Trowbridge. I doubt not that Mademoiselle Ostrander will have much of interest to relate.

"*Monsieur*" — his eyes and voice again became cold, hard, stonily expressionless — "if you can so far discommode yourself as to travel in the company of one whose nationality and methods you disapprove, I suggest you accompany us."

Niles Evander rose like a sleep-walker and followed us to my waiting car.

THE PREVIOUS day's rain had turned to snow with a shifting of the wind to the northeast, and we made slow progress through the suburban roads. It was nearly midnight when we trooped up the steps to the Evander porch and pushed vigorously at the bell-button.

"Yes, sir," Miss Ostrander replied to my question, "Mr. Evander came home last night and positively forbade my giving Mrs. Evander any more codein. I told him you wanted to see him right away, and that Dr. de Grandin had ordered the narcotic, but he said . . ."

"Forbear, if you please, *Mademoiselle*," de Grandin interrupted. "Monsieur Evander has already been at pains to say as much — and more — to us in person. Now, when did *Madame* disappear, if you please?"

"I'd already given her her medicine last night," the nurse took up her story at the point of interruption, "so there was no need of calling you to tell you of Mr. Evander's orders. I thought perhaps I could avoid any unpleasantness by pretending to obey him and giving her the codein on the sly this evening, but about 9 o'clock he came into the sickroom and snatched up the box of powders and put them in his pocket. Then he said he was going to drive over to have it out with you. I tried to telephone you about it, but the storm had put the wires out of commission, and I've been trying to get a message through ever since."

"And the dog, *Mademoiselle*, the animal who did howl outside the window, has he been active?"

"Yes! Last night he screamed

and howled so I was frightened. Positively, it seemed as though he were trying to jump up from the ground to the window. Mrs. Evander slept through it all, though, thanks to the drug."

"And tonight?" de Grandin prompted.

"Tonight!" The nurse shuddered. "The howling began about half-past nine, just a few minutes after Mr. Evander left for the city. Mrs. Evander was terrible. She seemed like a woman possessed. I fought and struggled with her, but nothing I could do had the slightest effect. She was savage as a maniac. I called James to help me hold her in bed once, and then, for a while, she lay quietly, for the thing outside seemed to have left."

"Sometime later the howling began again, louder and more furious, and Mrs. Evander was twice as hard to manage. She fought and bit so that I was beginning to lose control of her, and I screamed for James again. He must have been somewhere downstairs, though, for he didn't hear my call. I ran out into the hall and leaned over the balustrade to call again, and when I ran back — I wasn't out there more than a minute — the window was up and Mrs. Evander was gone."

"And didn't you do anything? — didn't you look for her?" Evander cut in passionately.

"Yes, sir. James and I ran outside and called and searched all through the grounds, but we couldn't find a trace of her. The wind is blowing so and the snow falling so rapidly, any tracks she might have made would have been wiped out almost immediately."

DE GRANDIN took his little pointed chin between the thumb and forefinger of his right hand and bowed his head in silent meditation. "Horns of the devil!" I heard him mutter to himself. "This is queer — those cries, that delirium, that attempted flight, now this disappearance. *Pardieu*, the trail seems clear. But why? *Mille cochons*, why?"

"See here," Evander broke in frantically, "can't you do something? Call the police, call the neighbors, call . . ."

"*Monsieur*," de Grandin interrupted in a frigid voice, "may I inquire your vocation?"

"Eh?" Evander was taken aback. "Why — er — I'm an engineer."

"Precisely, exactly. Dr. Trowbridge and I are medical men. We do not attempt to build bridges or sink tunnels. We should make sorry work of it. You, *Monsieur* have already once tried your hand at medicine by forbidding the administration of a drug we considered necessary. Your results were most deplorable. Kindly permit

us to follow our profession in our own way. The thing we most of all do not desire in this case is the police force. Later, perhaps. Now, it would be more than ruinous."

"But . . ."

"There are no buts, *Monsieur*. It is my belief that your wife, Madame Evander, is in no immediate danger. However, Dr. Trowbridge and I shall institute such search as may be practicable, and do you meantime keep in such communication with us as the storm will permit." He bowed formally. "A very good night to you, *Monsieur*."

Miss Ostrander looked at him questioningly. "Shall I go with you, doctor?" she asked.

"*Mais non*," he replied. "You will please remain here, *ma nounice*, and attend the homecoming of Madame Evander."

"Then you think she will return?"

"Most doubtlessly. Unless I am more badly mistaken than I think I am, she will be back to you before another day."

"Say," Evander, almost beside himself burst out, "what makes you so cocksure she'll be back? Good Lord, man, do you realize she's out in this howling blizzard with only her nightclothes on?"

"Perfectly. But I do declare she will return."

"But you've nothing to base your absurd . . ."

"*Monsieur!*" de Grandin's sharp, whiplike reply cut in. "Me, I am Jules de Grandin. When I say she will return, I mean she will return. I do not make mistakes."

"WHERE SHALL we begin the search?" I asked as we entered my car.

He settled himself snugly in the cushions and lighted a cigarette. "We need not search, *cher ami*," he replied. "She will return of her own free will and accord."

"But, man," I argued, "Evander was right; she's out in this storm with nothing but a Georgette nightdress on."

"I doubt it," he answered casually.

"You doubt it? Why. . .?"

"Unless the almost unmistakable signs fail, my friend, this Madame Evander, thanks to her husband's pig-ignorance, is this moment clothed in fur."

"Fur?" I echoed.

"Perfectly. Come, my friend, tread upon the gas. Let us snatch what sleep we can tonight — *eh bien*, tomorrow is another day."

HE WAS up and waiting for me as I entered the office next morning. "Tell me, Friend Trowbridge," he demanded, "this Madame Evander's leukemia, upon what did you base your diagnosis?"

"Well," I replied, referring

to my clinical cards, "a physical examination showed the axillary glands slightly enlarged, the red corpuscles reduced to little more than a million to the count, the white cells stood at about four hundred thousand, and the patient complained of weakness, drowsiness and a general feeling of malaise."

"U'm?" he commented non-committally. "That could easily be so. Yes; such signs would undoubtedly be shown. Now . . ." The telephone bell broke off his remarks half uttered.

"Ah?" his little blue eyes snapped triumphantly, as he listened to the voice on the wire. "I did think so. But yes; right away, at once, immediately.

"Trowbridge, my old one, she has returned. That was Mademoiselle Ostrander informing me of Madame Evander's reappearance. Let us hasten. There is much I would do this day."

"AFTER YOU went last night," Miss Ostrander told us, "I lay down on the chaise longue in the bedroom and tried to sleep. I suppose I must have napped by fits and starts, but it seemed to me I could hear the faint howling of dogs, sometimes mingled with yelps and cries, all through the night. This morning, just after 6 o'clock, I got up to prepare myself a piece of toast and a

cup of tea before the servants were stirring, and as I came downstairs I found Mrs. Evander lying on the rug in the front hall."

She paused a moment, and her color mounted slightly as she went on. "She was lying on that gray wolfskin rug before the fireplace, sir, and was quite nude. Her sleeping cap and nightgown were crumpled up on the floor beside her."

"Ah?" de Grandin commented. "And . . .?"

"I got her to her feet and helped her upstairs, where I dressed her for bed and tucked her in. She didn't seem to show any evil effects from being out in the storm. Indeed, she seems much better this morning, and is sleeping so soundly I could hardly wake her for breakfast, and when I did, she wouldn't eat. Just went back to sleep."

"Ah?" de Grandin repeated. "And you bathed her, *Mademoiselle*, before she was put to bed?"

The girl looked slightly startled. "No sir, not entirely; but I did wash her hands. They were discolored, especially about the fingertips, with some red substance, almost as if she had been scratching something, and gotten blood under her nails."

"*Parbleu!*" the Frenchman exploded. "I did know it, Friend

Trowbridge. Jules de Grandin, he is never mistaken.

"*Mademoiselle*," he turned feverishly to the nurse, "did you, by any happy chance, save the water in which you laved Madame Evander's hands?"

"Why, no, I didn't, but — oh I see — yes, I think perhaps some of the stain may be on the washcloth and the orange stick I cleaned her nails with. I really had quite a time cleaning them, too."

"*Bien, tres bien!*" he ejaculated. "Let us have these cloths, these sticks, at once, please. Trowbridge, do you withdraw some blood from *Madame's* arm for a test, then we must hasten to the laboratory. *Cordieu*, I burn with impatience!"

An hour later we faced each other in the office. "I can't understand it," I confessed. "By all the canons of the profession, Mrs. Evander ought to be dead after last night's experience, but there's no doubt she's better. Her pulse was firmer, her temperature right, and her blood count practically normal today."

"Me, I understand perfectly, up to a point," he replied. "Beyond that, all is dark as the cave of Erebus. Behold, I have tested the stains from *Madame's* fingers. They are — what do you think?"

"Blood?" I hazarded.

"*Parbleu*, yes, but not of hu-

manity. *Mais non, they are blood of a dog, my friend.*"

"Of a dog?"

"Perfectly. I, myself, did greatly fear they might prove human, but *grace a Dieu*, they are not. Now, if you will excuse, I go to make certain investigations, and will meet you at the *maison* Evander this evening. Come prepared to be surprised, my friend. *Parbleu*, I shall be surprised if I do not astonish myself!"

FOUR OF US, de Grandin, Miss Ostrander, Niles Evander and I, sat in the dimly lighted room, looking alternately toward the bed where the mistress of the house lay in a drugged sleep, into the still-burning fire of coals in the fireplace grate, and at each other's faces. Three of us were puzzled almost to the point of hysteria, and de Grandin seemed on pins and needles with excitement and expectation. Occasionally he would rise and walk to the bed with that quick soundless tread of his which always made me think of a cat. Again he would dart into the hall, nervously light a cigarette, draw a few quick puffs from it, then glide noiselessly into the sickroom once more. None of us spoke above a whisper, and our conversation was limited to inconsequential things. Throughout our group there was the tense expectancy

and solemn, taut-nerved air of medical witnesses in the prison death chamber awaiting the advent of the condemned.

Subconsciously, I think, we all realized what we waited for, but my nerves nearly snapped when it came.

With the suddenness of a shot, unheralded by any preliminary, the wild, vibrating howl of a beast sounded beneath the sickroom window, its sharp, poignant wail seeming to split the frigid, moonlit air of the night.

"*O-o-o — o-o-o-o — o-o-o — o-o-o-o!*" it rose against the winter stillness, diminished to a moan of heart-rending melancholy, then suddenly crescendoed upward, from a moan to a wail, from a wail to a howl, despairing, passionate, longing as the lament of a damned spirit, wild and fierce as the rallying call of the fiends of hell.

"Oh!" Miss Ostrander exclaimed involuntarily.

"Let bel" Jules de Grandin ordered tensely, his whisper seeming to carry more because of its sharpness than from any actual sound it made.

"*O-o-o — o-o-o-o — o-o-o — o-o-o-o!*" again the cry shuddered through the air, again it rose to a pitch of intolerable shrillness and evil, then died away, and, as we sat stone-still in the shadowy chamber, a new sound, a sinister, scraping sound, intensified by the ice-

hard coldness of the night, came to us. Someone, *something*, was swarming up the rose-trellis outside the house!

Scrape, scratch, scrape, the alternate hand- and foot-holds sounded on the cross-bars of the lattice. A pair of hands, long, slender, corded hands like hands of a cadaver long dead, and armed with talons, blood-stained and hooked, grasped the window-ledge, and a face — God of Mercy, such a face! — was silhouetted against the background of the night.

Not human, nor yet wholly bestial it was, but partook grotesquely of both, so that it was at once a foul caricature of each. The forehead was low and narrow, and sloped back to a thatch of short, nondescript-colored hair resembling an animal's fur. The nose was elongated out of all semblance to a human feature and resembled the pointed snout of some animal of the canine tribe except that it curved sharply down at the tip like the beak of some unclean bird of prey. Thin, cruel lips were drawn sneeringly back from a double row of tusklike teeth which gleamed horribly in the dim reflection of the open fire, and a pair of round, baleful eyes, green as the luminescence from a rotting carcass in a midnight swamp, glared at us across the windowsill. On each of us in turn the basilisk glance dwelt

momentarily, then fastened itself on the sleeping sick woman like a falcon's talons on a dove.

Miss Ostrander gave a single choking sob and slid forward from her chair unconscious. Evander and I sat stupefied with horror, unable to do more than gaze in terror-stricken silence at the apparition, but Jules de Grandin was out of his seat and across the room with a single bound of feline grace and ferocity.

"Arroint thee, accursed of God!" he screamed, showering a barrage of blows from a slender wand on the creature's face. "Back, spawn of Satan! To thy kennel, hound of hell! I, Jules de Grandin, command it!"

THE SUDDENNESS of his attack took the thing by surprise. For a moment it snarled and cowered under the hail-storm of blows from de Grandin's stick, then, as suddenly as it had come into view, it loosed its hold on the windowsill and dropped from sight.

"*Sang de Dieu, sang du diable; sang des tous les saints de ciel*" de Grandin roared, hurling himself out the window in the wake of the fleeing monster. "I have you, vile wretch. *Pardieu, Monsieur Loup-garou*, but I shall surely crush you!"

Rushing to the window, I

saw the tall, skeleton-thin form of the enormity leaping across the moonlit snow with great, space-devouring bounds, and after it, brandishing his wand, ran Jules de Grandin, shouting triumphant invectives in mingled French and English.

By the shadow of a copse of evergreens the thing made a stand. Wheeling in its tracks, it bent nearly double, extending its cadaverous claws like a wrestler searching for a hold, and baring its glistening tusks in a snarl of fury.

De Grandin never slackened pace. Charging full tilt upon the waiting monstrosity, he reached his free hand into his jacket pocket. There was a gleam of blue metal in the moonlight. Then eight quick, pitiless spurts of flame stabbed through the shadow where the monster lurked, eight whiplike crackling reports echoed and re-echoed in the midnight stillness — and the voice of Jules de Grandin:

"Trowbridge, non vieux, ohe, Friend Trowbridge, bring a light quickly! I would that you see what I see!"

Weltering in a patch of blood-stained snow at de Grandin's feet we found an elderly man, ruddy-faced, gray-haired, and, doubtless, in life, of a dignified, even benign aspect. Now, however, he lay in the snow as naked as the day his mother first saw him,

and eight gaping gunshot wounds told where de Grandin's missiles had found their mark. The winter cold was already stiffening his limbs and setting his face in a mask of death.

"Good heavens," Evander ejaculated as he bent over the lifeless form "it's Uncle Friedrich — my wife's uncle! He disappeared just before I went south."

"*Eh bien*," de Grandin regarded the body with no more emotion than if it had been an effigy molded in snow, "we shall know where to find your uncle henceforth, *Monsieur*. Will some of you pick him up? Me — *pardieu* I would no more touch him than I would handle a hyena!

"*NOW, Monsieur*," de Grandin faced Evander across the living room table, "your statement that the gentleman at whose happy dispatch I so fortunately officiated was your wife's uncle, and that he disappeared before your southern trip, does interest me. Say on, tell me all concerning this Uncle Friedrich of your wife's. When did he disappear, and what led up to his disappearance? Omit nothing, I pray you, for trifles which you may consider of no account may be of the greatest importance. Proceed, *Monsieur*. I listen."

Evander squirmed uncomfortably in his chair like a small boy undergoing catechism. "He

wasn't really her uncle," he responded. "Her father and he were schoolmates in Germany — Heidelberg — years ago. Mr. Hoffmeister — Uncle Friedrich — immigrated to this country shortly after my father-in-law came back, and they were in business together for years. Mr. Hoffmeister lived with my wife's people — all the children called him Uncle Friedrich — and was just like one of the family.

"My mother-in-law died a few years ago, and her husband died shortly after, and Mr. Hoffmeister disposed of his share of the business and went to Germany on a long visit. He was caught there in the war and didn't return to America until '21. Since that time he lived with us."

Evander paused a moment, as though debating mentally whether he should proceed, then smiled in a half shamefaced manner. "To tell you the truth," he continued, "I wasn't very keen on having him here. There were times when I didn't like the way he looked at my wife a dam' bit."

"Eh," de Grandin asked, "how was that, *Monsieur*?"

"Well, I can't quite put a handle to it in words, but more than once I'd glance up and see him with his eyes fastened on Edith in a most peculiar way. It would have angered me in a young man, but in an old man, it both angered and disgusted

me. I was on the point of asking him to leave when he disappeared and saved me the trouble."

"Yes?" de Grandin encouraged. "And his disappearance, what of that?"

"The old fellow was always an enthusiastic amateur botanist," Evander replied, "and he brought a great many specimens for his herbarium back from Europe with him. Off and on he's been messing around with plants since his return, and about a month ago he received a tin of dried flowers from Kerovitch, Rumania, and they seemed to set him almost wild."

"Kerovitch? *Mordieu!*" de Grandin exclaimed. "Say on, *Monsieur*; I burn with curiosity. Describe these flowers in detail, if you please."

"H'm," Evander took his chin in his hand and studied in silence a moment. "There wasn't anything especially remarkable about them that I could see. There were a dozen of them, all told, perhaps, and they resembled our ox-eyed daisies a good deal, except that their petals were red instead of yellow. Had a queer sort of odor, too. Even though they were dried, they exuded a sort of sickly-sweet smell, yet not quite sweet either. It was a sort of mixture of perfume and stench, if that means anything to you."

"*Pardieu*, it means much!" de Grandin assured him. "And their

sap, where it had dried, did it not resemble that of the milkweed plant?"

"Yes! How did you know?"

"No matter. Proceed, if you please. Your Uncle Friedrich did take these so accursed flowers out and . . ."

"And tried an experiment with them," Evander supplied. "He put them in a bowl of water, and they freshened up as though they had not been plucked an hour."

"Yes — and his disappearance — name of a little green man! — his disappearance?"

"That happened just before I went south. All three of us went to the theater one evening, and Uncle Friedrich wore one of the red flowers in his buttonhole. My wife wore a spray of them in her corsage. He tried to get me to put one of the things in my coat, too, but I hated their smell so much I wouldn't do it."

"Lucky you!" de Grandin murmured so low the narrator failed to hear him.

"UNCLE FRIEDRICH was very restless and queer all evening," Evander proceeded, "but the old fellow had been getting rather childish lately, so we didn't pay any particular attention to his actions. Next morning he was gone."

"And did you make inquiry?"

"No, he often went away on little trips without warning us beforehand, and, besides, I was

glad enough to see him get out. I didn't try to find him. It was just after this that my wife's health became bad, but I had to make this trip for our firm, so I called in Dr. Trowbridge, and there you are."

"Yes, *parbleu*, here we are, indeed!" de Grandin nodded emphatically. "Listen carefully, my friends; what I am about to say is the truth:

"When first I came to visit Madame Evander with Friend Trowbridge, and heard the strange story Mademoiselle Ostrander told, I was amazed. 'Why,' I ask me, 'does this lady answer the howling of a dog beneath her window?' *Parbleu*, it was most curious!

"Then while we three — Friend Trowbridge, Mademoiselle Ostrander and I — did talk of *Madame's* so strange malady, I did hear the call of that dog beneath the window with my own two ears, and did observe Madame Evander's reaction to it.

"Out the window I did put my head, and in the storm I saw no dog at all, but what I thought might be a human man — a tall, thin man. Yet a dog had howled beneath that window and had been answered by *Madame* but a moment before Me, I do not like that.

"I call upon that man, if such he be, to begone. Also I do request Mademoiselle Ostrander to place her patient under

an opiate each night, that the howls beneath her window may not awaken Madame Evander.

"*Eh bien*, thus far, thus good. But you do come along, *Monsieur*, and countermand my order. While *Madame* is not under the drug that unholy thing beneath her window does howl once more, and *Madame* disappears. Yes.

"Now, there was no ordinary medical diagnosis for such a case as this, so I search my memory and my knowledge for an extraordinary one. What do I find in that storehouse of my mind?

"In parts of Europe, my friends — believe me, I know whereof I speak! — there are known such things as werewolves, or wolf-men. In France we know them as *les loups-garoux*; in Wales they call them the bug-wolves, or bogie-wolves; in the days of old the Greeks did know them under the style of *lukanthropos*. Yes.

"What he is no one knows well. Sometimes he is said to be a wolf — a magical wolf — who can become a man. Sometimes, more often, he is said to be a man who can, or must, become a wolf. No one knows accurately. But this we know: The man who is also a wolf is ten times more terrible than the wolf who is only a wolf. At night he quests and kills his prey, which is most often his fellow man, but sometimes

his ancient enemy, the dog. By day he hides his villainy under the guise of a man's form. Sometimes he changes entirely to a wolf's shape, sometimes he becomes a fearful mixture of man and beast, but always he is a devil incarnate. If he be killed while in the wolf shape, he at once reverts to human form, so by that sign we know we have slain a werewolf and not a true wolf. Certainly.

"NOW, SOME werewolves become such by the aid of Satan; some become so as the result of a curse; a few are so through accident. In Transylvania, that devil-ridden land, the very soil does seem to favor the transformation of man into beast. There are springs from which the water, once drunk, will make its drinker into a savage beast, and there are flowers — *cordieu*, have I not seen them? — which, if worn by a man at night during the full of the moon, will do the same. Among the most potent of these blooms of hell is *la fleur de sang*, or blood-flower, which is exactly the accursed weed you have described to us, Monsieur Evander — the flower your Uncle Friedrich and your lady did wear to the theater that night of the full moon. When you mentioned the village of Kerovitch, I did see it all at once, immediately,

for that place is on the Rumanian side of the Transylvanian Alps, and there the blood - flowers are found in greater numbers than anywhere else in the world. The very mountain soil does seem cursed with lycanthropy.

"Very well. I did not know of the flower when first I came into this case, but I did suspect something evil had cast a spell on *Madame*. She did exhibit all the symptoms of a lycanthrope about to be transformed, and beneath her window there did howl what was undoubtedly a wolf-thing.

"He has put his cursed sign upon her and does even now seek her for his mate,' I tell me after I order him away in the name of the good God.

"When *Madame* disappeared I was not surprised. When she returned after a night in the snow, I was less surprised. But the blood on her hands did perturb me. Was it human? Was she an all-unconscious murderer, or was it, happily, the blood of animals? I did not know. I analyzed it and discovered it were dog's blood. 'Very well,' I tell me. 'Let us see where a dog has been mauled in that vicinity.'

"This afternoon I made guarded inquiries. I find many dogs have been strangely killed in this neighborhood of late. No dog, no matter how big,

was safe out of doors after nightfall.

"Also I meet a man, an *ivrogne*—what you call a drunkard—one who patronizes the leggers - of - the - boot not with wisdom, but with too great frequency. He is no more so. He have made the oath to remain sober. *Pourquoi?* Because three nights ago, as he passed through the park he were set upon by a horror so terrible that he thought he was in alcoholic delirium. It were like a man, yet not like a man. It had a long nose, and terrible eyes, and great, flashing teeth, and it did seek to kill and devour him. My friends, in his way, that former drunkard did describe the thing which tried to enter this house tonight. It were the same.

"Fortunately for the poor drunken man, he were carrying a walking cane of ash wood, and when he raised it to defend himself, the terror did shrink from him. 'Ah ha,' I tell me when I hear that, 'now we know it were truly *le loup-garou*,' for it is notorious that the wood of the ash tree is as intolerable to the werewolf as the bloom of the garlic is unpleasant to the vampire.

"WHAT DO I do? I go to the woods and cut a bundle of ash switches. Then I come here. Tonight the wolf-thing come crying for the mate who raned the snows with him last night.

He is lonely, he is mad for another of his kind. Tonight, perhaps, they will attack nobler game than dogs. Very well, I am ready.

"When Madame Evander, being drugged, did not answer his call, he was emboldened to enter the house. *Pardieu*, he did not know Jules de Grandin awaited him! Had I not been here it might well have gone hard with Mademoiselle Ostrander. As it was"—he spread his slender hands—"there is one less man-monster in the world this night."

Evander stared at him in round-eyed wonder. "I can't believe it," he muttered, "but you've proved your case. Poor Uncle Friedrich! The curse of the blood-flower . . ." He broke off, an expression of mingled horror and despair on his face. "My wife!" he gasped. "Will she become a thing like that? Will . . . ?"

"*Monsieur*," de Grandin interrupted gently, "she *has* become one. Only the drug holds her bound in human form at this minute."

"Oh," Evander cried, tears of grief streaming down his face, "save her! For the love of heaven, save her! Can't you do anything to bring her back to me?"

"You do not approve my methods," de Grandin reminded him.

Evander was like a pleading child. "I apologize," he whimp-

ered. "I'll give you anything you ask if you'll only save her. I'm not rich, but I think I can raise fifty thousand dollars. I'll give it to you if you'll cure her!"

The Frenchman twisted his little blond mustache furiously. "The fee you name is attractive, *Monsieur*," he remarked.

"I'll pay it; I'll pay it!" Evander burst out hysterically. Then, unable to control himself, he put his folded arms on the table, sank his head upon them, and shook with sobs.

"Very well," de Grandin agreed, casting me the flicker of a wink. "Tomorrow night I shall undertake your lady's case. Tomorrow night we attempt the cure. *Au revoir, Monsieur*. Come away, Friend Trowbridge, we must rest well before tomorrow night."

De GRANDIN was silent to the point of moodiness all next morning. Toward noon he put on his outdoor clothing and left without luncheon, saying he would meet me at Evander's that night.

He was there when I arrived and greeted me, saying that the main business would start soon.

"Meantime, Trowbridge, *mon vieux*, I beg you will assist me in the kitchen. There is much to do and little time in which to do it."

Opening a large valise he produced a bundle of slender sticks which he began splitting

into strips like basketwithes, explaining that they were from a mountain ash tree. When some twenty-five of these had been prepared, he selected a number of bottles from the bottom of the satchel, and, taking a large aluminum kettle, began scouring it with a clean cloth.

"Attend me carefully, Friend Trowbridge," he commanded; "do you keep close tally as I compound the draft, for much depends on the formula being correct. To begin."

Arranging a pair of apothecary's scales and a graduate glass before him on the table, he handed me this memorandum.

R

3 pints pure spring water
2 drachms sulfur
½ oz. castorium
6 drachms opium
3 drachms asafoetida
½ oz. hypericum
½ oz. aromatic ammonia
½ oz. gum camphor

As he busied himself with scales and graduate I checked the amounts he poured into the kettle. "Voila," he announced, "we are prepared!"

Quickly he thrust the ash withes into a pailful of boiling water and proceeded to bind together a three-stranded hyssop of ash, poplar and birch twigs.

"And now, my friend, if you will assist me, we shall proceed," he asserted, thrusting a large washpan into my hands and preparing to follow me into

the dining room with the kettle of liquor he had prepared, his little brush-broom thrust under his arm.

We moved the dining room furniture against the walls, and de Grandin put the kettle of liquid in the dishpan I had brought in, piling a number of light wood chips about it, and starting a small fire. As the liquid in the kettle began bubbling and seething over the flame, he knelt and began tracing a circle about seven feet in diameter with a bit of white chalk. Inside the first circle he drew a second ring some three feet in diameter, and within this traced a star composed of two interlaced triangles. At the very center he marked down an odd-looking figure composed of a circle surmounted by a crescent and supported by a cross. "This is the Druid's foot, or pentagram," he explained, indicating the star. "The powers of evil are powerless to pass it, either from without or within. This," he pointed to the central figure, "is the sign of Mercury. It is also the sign of the Holy Angels, my friend, and the *bon Dieu* knows we shall need their kind offices this night. Compare, Friend Trowbridge, if you please, the chart I have drawn with the exemplar which I did most carefully prepare from the occult books today. I would have the testimony of both of

us that I have left nothing undone."

Into my hand he thrust the following chart:



Quickly, working like one possessed, he arranged seven small silver lamps about the outer circle where the seven little rings on the chart indicated, ignited their wicks, snapped off the electric light and, rushing into the kitchen, returned with the boiled ash withes dangling from his hand.

Fast as he had worked, there was not a moment to spare, for Miss Ostrander's hysterical call, "Dr. de Grandin, oh, Dr. de Grandin!" came down the stairs as he returned from the kitchen.

ON THE bed Mrs. Evander lay writhing like a person in convulsions. As we approached, she turned her face toward us, and I stopped in my tracks,

speechless with the spectacle before me.

It was as if the young woman's pretty face were twisted into a grimace, only the muscles, instead of resuming their wonted positions again, seemed to stretch steadily out of place. Her mouth widened gradually till it was nearly twice its normal size, her nose seemed lengthening, becoming more pointed, and crooking sharply at the end. Her eyes, of sweet cornflower blue, were widening, becoming at once round and prominent, and changing to a wicked, phosphorescent green. I stared and stared, unable to believe the evidence of my eyes, and as I looked she raised her hands from beneath the covers, and I went sick with the horror of it. The dainty, flowerlike pink-and-white hands with their well-manicured nails were transformed into a pair of withered, corded talons armed with long, hornlike, curved claws, saber-sharp and hooked like the nails of some predatory bird. Before my eyes a sweet, gently bred woman was being transfigured into a foul hell-hag, a loathsome, hideous parody of herself.

"Quickly, Friend Trowbridge, seize her, bind her!" de Grandin called, thrusting a handful of the limber withes into my grasp and hurling himself upon the monstrous thing which lay in Edith Evander's place.

The hag fought like a true member of the wolf pack. Howling, clawing, growling and snarling, she opposed tooth and nail to our efforts, but at last we lashed her wrists and ankles firmly with the wooden cords and bore her struggling frantically, down the stairs and placed her within the mystic circle de Grandin had drawn on the dining room floor.

"Inside, Friend Trowbridge, quickly!" the Frenchman ordered as he dipped the hyssop into the boiling liquid in the kettle and leaped over the chalk marks. "Mademoiselle Ostrand-er, Monsieur Evander, for your lives, leave the house!"

Reluctantly the husband and nurse left us and de Grandin began showering the contorting, howling thing on the floor with liquid from the boiling kettle.

SWINGING HIS hyssop in the form of a cross above the hideous changeling's head, he uttered some invocation so rapidly that I failed to catch the words, then, striking the wolf-woman's feet, hands, heart and head in turn with his bundle of twigs, he drew forth a small black book and began reading in a firm, clear voice: *"Out of the deep have I called unto Thee, O Lord; Lord hear my voice. . . ."*

And at the end he finished with a great shout: *"I know*

that my redeemer liveth . . . I am the resurrection and the life, saith the Lord: he that believeth in me, though he were dead, yet shall he live!"

As the words sounded through the room it seemed to me that a great cloud of shadow, like a billow of black vapor, rose from the dark corners of the apart-ment, eddied toward the circle of lamps, swaying their flames lambently, then suddenly gave back, evaporated and dis-appeared with a noise like steam escaping from a boiling kettle.

"B e h o l d , Trowbridge, my friend," de Grandin ordered, pointing to the still figure which lay over the sign of Mercury at his feet.

I bent forward, stifling my re-pugnance, then sighed with mingled relief and surprise. Calm as a sleeping child, Edith Evander, freed from all the hid-eous stigmata of the wolf-peo-ple, lay before us, her slender hands, still bound in the wood-en ropes, crossed on her breast, her sweet, delicate features as though they had never been dis-figured by the curse of the blood-flower.

Loosing the bonds from her wrists and feet the Frenchman picked the sleeping woman up in his arms and bore her to her bedroom above stairs.

"Do you summon her hus-band and the nurse, my friend," he called from the turn in the

stairway. "She will have need of both anon."

"WH — WHY, she's herself again!" Evander exclaimed joyfully as he leaned solicitously above his wife's bed.

"But of course!" de Grandin agreed. "The spell of evil was strong upon her, *Monsieur*, but the charm of good was mightier. She is released from her bondage for all time."

"I'll have your fee ready tomorrow," Evander promised diffidently. "I could not arrange the mortgages today — it was rather short notice, you know."

Laughter twinkled in de Grandin's little blue eyes like the reflection of moonlight on flowing water. "My friend," he replied, "I did make the good joke on you last night. *Parbleu*, to hear you agree to anything, and to announce that you did trust to my methods, as well, was payment enough for me. I want not your money. If you would repay Jules de Grandin for his services, continue to love and cherish your wife as you did last night when you feared you were about to lose her. Me, *morbleu!* but I shall make the eyes of my *confreres* pop with jealousy when I tell them what I have accomplished this night. *Sang d'un poisson*, I am one very clever man, *Monsieur!*"

"IT'S ALL A mystery to me, de Grandin," I confessed as we

drove home, "but I'm hanged if I can understand how it was that the man was transformed into a monster almost as soon as he wore those flowers, and the woman resisted the influence of the things for a week or more."

"Yes," he agreed, "that is strange. Myself, I think it was because werewolfism is an outward and visible sign of the power of evil, and the man was already steeped in sin, while the woman was pure in heart. She had what we might call a higher immunity from the virus of the blood-flower."

"And wasn't there some old legend to the effect that a werewolf could only be killed with a silver bullet?"

"Ah bah," he replied with a laugh. "What did those old legend-mongers know of the power of modern firearms? *Parbleu*, had the good St. George possessed a military rifle of today, he might have slain the dragon without approaching nearer than a mile! When I did shoot that wolfman, my friend, I had something more powerful than superstition in my hand. *Morbleu*, but I did shoot a hole in him large enough for him to have walked through!"

"That reminds me," I added, "how are we going to explain his body to the police?"

"Explain?" he echoed with a chuckle. "Nom d'un bouc, we

shall not explain: I, myself, did dispose of him this very afternoon. He lies buried beneath the roots of an ash tree, with a stake of ash through his heart to hold him to the earth. His sinful body will rise again no more to plague us, I do assure you. He was known to have a habit of disappearing. Very good. This time there will be no

reappearance. We are through, finished, done with him for good."

We drove another mile or so in silence, then my companion nudged me sharply in the ribs. "This curing of werewolf ladies, my friend," he confided, "it is dry work. Are you sure there is a full bottle of brandy in the cellar?"

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SHRIEK

the cauldron

Many of you have asked about subscription rates for STARTLING MYSTERY STORIES. We have not been offering subscriptions thus far because SMS is still in the experimental stage. We are trying it out, to see how it goes. In the publishing business, it takes many months after an issue has gone off sale before one can tell what happened, good or bad. If your letters and ballots are any indication, then our first issue did well — but we cannot tell whether your letters bear any real relationship to general sales. It is a very mysterious thing, but sometimes a large number of enthusiastic letters turns out to have shown only that the issue in question was highly thought of by a few people; it did not gain a good sale. Conversely, an issue which did not draw much mail, or did not draw much favorable mail, will prove to have sold quite well. And — in order to keep us thoroughly baffled, I think at times — there have been other instances where many letters went hand-in-hand with good sales and few letters hand-in-hand with poor sales. So we are waiting; when we have sufficient data we will decide whether SMS is to be continued, and if so (as I hope, and many of you hope) how often it ought to be issued. When we have a firm schedule, then we can start soliciting subscriptions. Meanwhile, all

issues are available at this address at 50c the copy, postpaid.

Luther Norris, 3844 Watseka, Culver City, California 90231, writes: "Congratulations on the first issue of STARTLING MYSTERY STORIES. I sincerely hope future issues will continue to contain the same high quality material.

"As Lord Warden of the Praed Street Irregulars, it occurred to me that your readers might be interested in the PSI — a gentle spoof on the BSI (Baker Street Irregulars). As the Adventures of Solar Pons are to appear in the pages of STARTLING MYSTERY STORIES, I take this opportunity to offer you an investiture title in The Praed Street Irregulars.

"I note that two of your authors will be present for the formal establishment of The PSI — Robert Bloch (The Norcross Riddle) and August Derleth (The Agent). A. E. van Vogt and Stuart Palmer will also be on hand June 12th at the Ivory Towers, Hollywood.

"Readers interested in obtaining a titular investiture in the Praed Street Irregulars should apply to the Lord Warden of the Pontine Marshes at the above address. The only requirement is a serious (but not too serious!) interest in the Solar Pons Canon. Needless to say, membership is limited."

We were, unfortunately, unable to attend the festivities of the noble PSI, which came off very well, we hear, but the Lord Warden performed investiture upon us in effigy, or whatever, sending us a very neat and proper looking scroll wherein we are identified as *The Catalytic Agent*.

Meanwhile, we regret that we could not fit the adventure of Solar Pons we had planned to use into this present issue — but we hope to present him to you in our next issue.

Ed Wood writes from 6553 Green Way, Apt. #2, Greendale, Wisconsin 53129, "In your #1 STARTLING MYSTERY STORIES . . . you state that *The Off Season* is Gerald W. Page's second story (page 128). You are mistaken. He had *The Happy Man* in ANALOG, March 1963. . . . Good luck with your magazine and other editing activities."

Correction sustained; we should have been more careful and said only that this was Mr. Page's second story for the Health Knowledge fiction group.

Writing from 8 Shurland Ave., Mike Ashley comments thus upon our first issue: "I just couldn't bring myself to separating HPL's marvelous story from the Jules de Grandin piece. Both were sufficiently different and brilliantly conceived as to warrant equal marks. Had I to separate them, I think HPL would win, but by the narrowest of margins. It'd be a crime if you didn't reprint more of Quinn's de Grandin stories, now wouldn't it?"

"S. B. H. Hurst's story was almost as good. It deserved first place long before that ending concreted it there. And then I go and

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read Quinn. RAWL, are you trying to drive us all mad deciding which story is best? I go half-crazy as it is waiting for each issue of MAGAZINE OF HORROR. . . .

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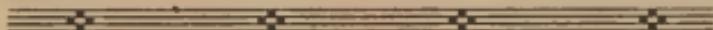
"Despite Bloch's humor he manages to turn *House of the Hatchet* into a real shocker. Derleth's one isn't as effective but was still very entertaining. Gerald Page has made a fine start. His *The Tree* was a marvelous debut and he keeps his standard up here. If anything he improves it."

"As was the case in SMS #1, the Jules de Grandin story was worth the price of admission,"

writes Gene D'Orsogna, from Blinker Light Rd., Stony Brook, New York, about our second issue. "I also enjoyed the Brunner story, but not as a mystery! It was science fiction through and through. Bravo on *The Strange Case of Pascal*. Although this, again, was not mystery, it was fascinating. The description of the 'Blenheim-Spider' was terrific. The only other place where I have read such a vivid monster description was in Robert E. Howard's *Valley of the Worm*. One question: Where was author Ulmer's biographical sketch in *The Cauldron*?

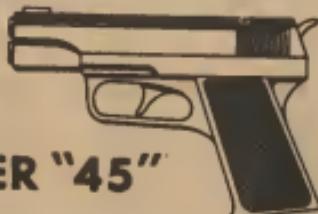
"More de Grandin stories! How about serializing the Quinn novel, *The Devil's Bride*?"

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formation about him to give you. We first read this story in 1937, through the courtesy of Arthur L. Widner, who loaned me the June 1926 issue of *WEIRD TALES*, where it appeared originally, and it has stuck in our memory all these years; that is why we thought it might be worth running in SMS.

T. L. G. Cockcroft credits the story to Robert E. Ulmer in his *Index to the Weird Fiction Magazines* (Index by Author), listing the same also as author of *The Headless Horror* in the April 1925 issue — but we think that Mr. Cockcroft has accidentally telescoped two separate Ulmers, Robert E. and Roger Eugene.

The Devil's Bride is quite a long novel, and would have to run to a number of installments were we to try to use it serially in SMS. As fond as we are of reading continued stories, we do feel that a wait of three months between installments is just too much to impose upon you; and even if SMS appeared every other month we would hesitate to break up a story into more than two parts. (And running it thus would mean that each part took up half the issue!)

Nicholas Adams writes from 47 Darcy Street, Newark, New Jersey 07105, "The story, *Doctor Satan*, was truly outstanding and yet you do not mention whether Paul Ernst made a series of stories about him. Try to present more of them. As usual, the Seabury Quinn selection

was wonderful — more de Grandin, please. I liked this issue's Simon Ark story more than last issue's."

Yes, Paul Ernst wrote a number of stories dealing with the mysterious and sinister Dr. Satan, and Ascot Keane's struggle with him. We await the majority opinion of those of you, the readers, who take the trouble to let us know about your preferences, as to whether we should bring further tales in this series to you.

"*The House of Horror* was one of the scariest stories I have ever read," writes Robert Sawyer from Ocean Point, Maine 04557. "You should have more of Seabury Quinn. Every story in the second issue was good; it was just a question of deciding which was best."

Your response to Jules de Grandin in our first issue, and the trend that your preferences shown in the votes we have received on the second issue thus far, leave us little doubt that you want more of Mr. Quinn's fascinating tales in this series. And so long as your response indicates that you are not getting bored with Jules de Grandin, we shall continue to accept Mr. Quinn's kind permission to use them.

Charles Hidley of 214 S. 13th Street, Harrisburg, Penna., 17104, offers a different variety of opinion: "Never read Bertram Russell

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Have You Missed Any of Our Earlier Publications?

Many readers have asked us if back issues of MAGAZINE OF HORROR are still available. The answer is — yes, for the time being, they are; but some issues are not so plentiful as they were. While they last, they can all be had for the cover price of 50c per copy, postpaid.

#1, August 1963: The Man With a Thousand Legs, Frank Belknap Long; A Thing of Beauty, Wallace West; The Yellow Sign, Robert W. Chambers; The Maze and the Monster, Edward D. Hoch; The Death of Halpin Frayser, Ambrose Bierce; Babylon: 70 M., Donald A. Wollheim; The Inexperienced Ghost, H. G. Wells; The Unbeliever, Robert Silverberg; Fidel Bassin, W. J. Stamper; The Last Dawn, Frank Lillie Pollock, The Undying Head Mark Twain.

#2, November 1963: The Space-Eaters, Frank Belknap Long; The Faceless Thing, Edward D. Hoch; The Red Room, H. G. Wells; Hungary's Female Vampire, Dean Lipton; A Tough Tussle, Ambrose Bierce; Doorslammer, Donald A. Wollheim; The Electric Chair, George Waight; The Other One, Jerryl L. Keane; The Charmer, Archie Binns; Clarissa, Robert A. W. Lowndes; The Strange Ride of Morrowbie Jukes, Rudyard Kipling.

#3, February 1964: The Seeds of Death, David H. Keller; The Seeking Thing, Janet Hirsch; A Vision of Judgment, H. G. Wells; The Place of the Pythons, Arthur J.

Burks; Jean Bouchon, S. Baring-Gould; The Door, Rachel Cosgrove Payes; One Summer Night, Ambrose Bierce; Luella Miller, Mary Wilkins-Freeman; They That Wait, H. S. W. Chibbett; The Repairer of Reputations, Robert W. Chambers.

#4, May 1964: Out of print.

#5, September 1964: Cassius, Henry S. Whitehead; Love at First Slight, J. L. Miller; Five-Year Contract, J. Vernon Shea; The House of the Worm, Merle Prout, The Beautiful Sult, H. G. Wells; A Stranger Came to Reap, Stephen Dentinger; The Morning the Birds Forgot to Sing, Walt Liebscher; Bones, Donald A. Wollheim; The Ghostly Rental, Henry James.

#6, November 1964: Caverns of Horror, Laurence Manning; Prodigy, Walt Liebscher; The Mask, Robert W. Chambers; The Life-After-Death of Mr. Thaddeus Warde, Robert Barbour Johnson; The Feminine Fraction, David Grinnell; Dr. Heidegger's Experiment, Nathaniel Hawthorne; The Pacer, August Derleth; The Moth, H. G. Wells; The Door to Saturn, Clark Ashton Smith.

(Turn to Page 123 for further list of Contents)

Order Back Issues From Page 128

— a very fascinating Lovecraftian — and how I'd like to get at that serial. Hoch's Witch far below the previous Simon Ark tale — very much not SMS material. I was stunned by your blow-by-blow account of Bloch's *House of the Hatchet* being in first place. I've never read anything so meretricious and hack-ridden from Bloch's pen. Your readers and I are *so* out of step. Wish you'd be a little more consistent on the dating of reprints. All right, I'm compulsive — but it is interesting knowing sources, etc. *Dr. Satan* just couldn't command me as he did when I was 14 years old."

The serial by Bertram Russell was *The Bat-Men of Thorium* (WEIRD TALES, May, June, July 1928) and was a science fiction novel not too far from the sort that ran in ARCOV in those days.

The response on the two Simon Ark stories has been very mixed, thus far; some readers have liked both and want more of them; others liked neither and want no more; still others liked one, but not the other (no general agreement on which one) and are willing to see more. To the editor this indicates that we should present at least one

more story in this series (not all of which are weird enough to belong in SMS) but not immediately.

Pleading for more de Grandin, and covers by Virgil Finlay, Brian Mouritzen of Calgary, Alberta, Canada, continues; "About the science fiction controversy: I agree with the readers who feel that STARTLING MYSTERY should be essentially a fantasy magazine. But as a science fiction fan, I feel it only fair to point out that science fiction and fantasy are allied forms of literature and are often indistinguishable from each other. Therefore, I have no objection to science fiction in STARTLING MYSTERY, so long as it does not edge out the fantasy, which forms the backbone of your magazine. After all, even the greatest fantasy magazine of them all — WEIRD TALES — carried science fiction. And some science fiction stories certainly qualify as startling mysteries! Keep up the good work!"

We feel that Reader Mouritzen has hit the nail squarely so far as the controversy about tales which might be categorized as fantasy or science fiction are concerned in selecting the contents of STARTLING



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MYSTERY STORIES. This is, indeed, our basis for selection; we have no bias against any other category into which a story might be put so long as it seems to qualify as unusual, eerie, or strange mystery. We also want to make the definition of "mystery" broad, too, in order to avoid that bane of all specialized magazines — sameness. In so doing, we are bound to run some stories which any particular one of you, the readers, will feel do not belong in SMS — and, perhaps in some instances, those of you who feel this way about a particular story will be right, because the editor isn't perfect.

It is true that *WEIRD TALES* published science fiction pretty much continuously; and up to the middle of 1929, when there were no more than two all-science-fiction magazines available, this could be considered a good thing. Later, when there were more science fiction magazines on the stands than most readers could keep up with, this became less desirable, except where a particular story was really a weird or horror tale and did not click with the regular publications. Unfortunately, it was just at this time that the science fiction in *WEIRD TALES* (with a few exceptions) became indistinguishable from the fiction in some of the regular science fiction magazines. This is the sort of thing we want to avoid in *MAGAZINE OF HORROR* and *STARTLING MYSTERY STORIES*. We do not want to bring you science fiction of the caliber that you can find regularly in *ANALOG*, *AMAZING*, *GALAXY*, *IF*, etc. You may, however, find occasional pieces of our nature in *FANTASY AND SCIENCE FICTION*, *FANTASTIC*, etc.; but the market is not saturated with the horror or eerie/mystery sort of science fiction.

Now for a look at some of our

Did You Miss These
Back Issues Of
MAGAZINE OF HORROR?

#10, August 1965: *The Girl at Heddon's*, Pauline Kappel Prilucik; *The Torture of Hope*, Villiers de L'Isle-Adam; *The Cloth of Madness*, Seabury Quinn; *The Tree*, Gerald W. Page; *In the Court of the Dragon*, Robert W. Chambers; *Placide's Wife*, Kirk Mashburn; *Come Closer*, Joanna Russ; *The Plague of the Living Dead*, A. Hyatt Verrill.

#11, November 1965: *The Empty Zoo*, Edward D. Hoch; *A Psychological Shipwreck*, Ambrose Bierce; *The Call of the Mech-Men*, Laurence Manning; *Was It a Dream?*, Guy de Maupassant; *Under the Hau Tree*, Katherine Yates; *The Head of Du Bois*, Dorothy Norman Cooke; *The Dweller in Dark Valley*, (verse), Robert E. Howard; *The Devil's Pool*, Greya la Spina.

#12, Winter 1965/66: *The Faceless God*, Robert Bloch; *Master Nicholas*, Seabury Quinn; *But Not the Herald*, Roger Zelazny; *Dr. Muncing, Exorcist*, Gordon MacCreagh; *The Affair at 7 Rue de M.*, John Steinbeck; *The Man in the Dark*, Irwin Ross; *The Abyss*, Robert A. W. Lownes; *Destination* (verse), Robert E. Howard; *Memories of HPL*, Muriel E. Eddy; *The Black Beast*, Henry S. Whitehead.

#13, Summer 1966: *The Thing in the House*, H. F. Scotten; *Divine Madness*, Roger Zelazny; *Valley of the Lost*, Robert E. Howard; *Heredity*, David H. Keller; *Dwelling of the Righteous*, Anna Hunger; *Almost Immortal*, Austin Hall.

contributors in this issue, whom we have not told you about previously.

GASTON LEROUX was a well-known writer of mystery and terror tales in the twenties and thirties in France. He is best remembered as author of *The Phantom of the Opera*, which has seen several cinematic versions, none of the later ones comparable to the first two, which starred Lon Chaney. We did not see the very first, but have vivid recollections of the second, which was a "talking" film, except for Chaney himself; when he "spoke" the picture went blank to show his words, in the fashion of the silent films — the practice of letting the dialogue appear along with the picture came later. The film was mostly black and white, but there was one sequence in color, when the "Phantom" appears at the Ball. Leroux also wrote various novels about Arsene Lupin, some in which he tangles with Sherlock Holmes, and numerous short stories.

RALPH E. HAYES is a mystery and detective story writer who would have appeared in the fourth issue of *CHASE* had there been a fourth issue; the present story was also on the waiting list at the time the magazine breathed its last, for had *CHASE* continued we would have included an occasional tale of the sort wherein STARTLING MYSTERY STORIES specializes.

RAMA WELLS is well known for non-fiction under a different name, which we are constrained not to divulge; this is his first appearance with us, but he is reticent about saying whether it is also his first fiction sale.

HUGH B. CAVE had a dozen stories in *WEIRD TALES* between the issues of May 1932 (*The Brotherhood of Blood*) and June-July 1939 (*The Death-Watch*) and also appeared in *STRANGE TALES* and *THE MAGIC CARPET* during this period. He also appeared in *ORIENTAL STORIES* and *TMC* under the pseudonym of Geoffrey Vace.

For those of you who have not seen our earlier issues, SEABURY QUINN has had nearly a hundred tales centering around Jules de Grandin and Dr. Trowbridge, and a dozen of them appear in *The Phantom Fighter*, from *Mycroft & Moran*; Publishers, Sauk City, Wisconsin 53583, 263pp; \$5.00. All twelve are very good to excellent de Grandin adventures, and you won't see them here in SMS, as our agreement with the author does not include them. The tales are otherwise available only rare and increasingly-hard-to-locate-at-any-price issues of *WEIRD TALES* (selected from issues between 1925 and 1934). We recommend the volume highly to all who have enjoyed these stories in SMS. RAWL



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THE EDITOR'S PAGE (continued from page 8)

you are reading it; if nothing about it *stops you* with the feeling that "this is ridiculous", then it doesn't matter too much whether a flaw here and there will come to you later. The author has succeeded in his primary intent of entertaining you. What you figure out later may or may not allow you to re-read the story with pleasure. If you can, even realizing the flaw, then the author has still succeeded — as Edgar Rice Burroughs does, for me, in his Mars, Venus, and Pellucidar series, as well as with the Tarzan novels.

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#2, Fall 1966: The House of Horror, Seabury Quinn; The Men in Black, John Brunner; The Strange Case of Pascal, Roger Eugene Ulmer; The Witch Is Dead, Edward D. Hoch; The Secret of the City, Terry Carr and Ted White; The Street (verse), Robert W. Lowndes; The Scourge of B'Moth, Betram Russell.

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